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KEITH BELLOWES

Passionate about travel and world cultures, Bellows, a Canadian citizen, was born in the Congo and schooled at Gordonstoun in Scotland, with fellow classmate Prince Charles. He's the editor-in-chief of *National Geographic Traveler* and the author of a *100 Places That Will Change Your Child's Life*. Keith believes that travel is a vital way to foster the next generation of global citizens. Read how his father inspired his journey to the rugged Amazon on page 36.



POLLY BALDWIN

She's a freelance photographer with a passion for dramatic landscapes and action sports – so it is no accident that you'll find her in Val d'Isère and Courchevel in the French Alps for most of the European winter (page 20). She produces commercial images for the ski industry and travel and sports magazines, as well as for tourists. 'It is a challenging environment to work in, but the view from my office window is probably one of the best in the world!' says Polly.



ANDREW EVANS

Two years ago, in pursuit of a lifelong dream, Andrew hopped on a Greyhound bus in Washington DC. Carrying nothing but a backpack and bus fare, he travelled over 16 000 kilometres to the South Pole – having a good old-fashioned adventure you can read about on page 80. As we went to print Andrew was in South Africa after completing another journey – this time from Cape Horn, the southernmost tip of South America, to the Cape of Good Hope – and was last seen sampling bunny chow in Durban.

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

TRAVELLER

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER SOUTH AFRICA

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 PO Box 2271, Cape Town 8000. Tel 021 443 9871

Subscription enquiries 0860 103 578 or email subs@media24.com

Reproduction Media24 **Printing** Paarl Media Cape **Distribution** On The Dot



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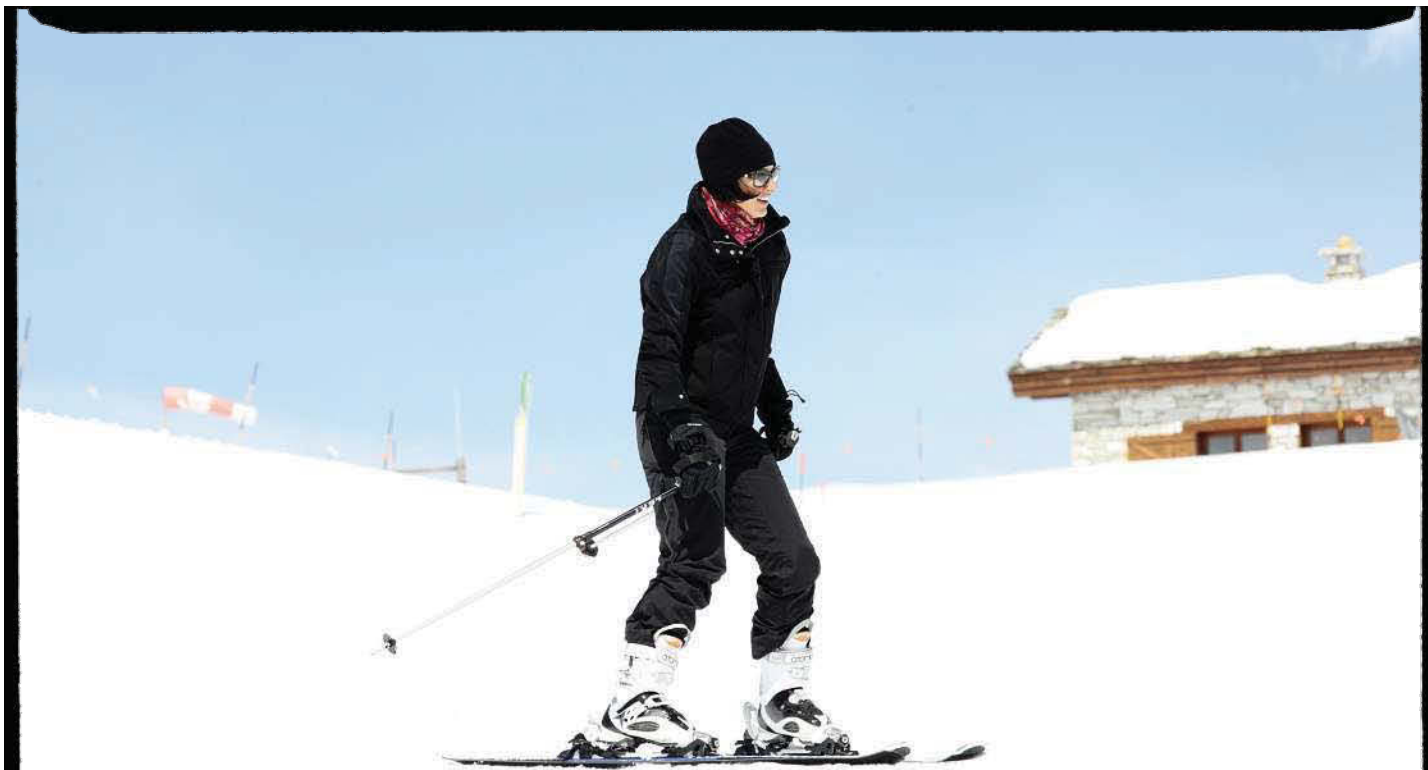
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National Geographic Traveller is published and distributed four times a year by Media24, with permission of the National Geographic Society, Washington DC, 20036.



On a recent trip to the French resort of Val d'Isère

it dawned on me that unless you live in the mountains, there is no more perfect escape than a skiing holiday. Fresh air, magnificent scenery and ample sunshine are a lethal combination when combined with a range of outdoor pursuits guaranteed to get the adrenaline going (or not, if you're happiest in a hot tub or on a sun lounger at 1 800 metres above sea level). Not to mention the allure of thrice-daily servings of hearty alpine food. For most of us, this kind of experience is in stark contrast to our everyday lives, and therefore utterly addictive.

But skiing is not for the faint of heart – or those with long pockets. It requires copious research and careful planning, not to mention a degree of spontaneity (so you can snap up a good deal when it presents itself). Which is why in this issue we've dedicated 10 pages to a range of ski holidays that will suit every budget and persuasion, from family-friendly to luxury and even the uber-adventurous.

And in the spirit of taking you out of your comfort zone, we've gone a step further to give this issue a real sense of adventure, with a trip to Antarctica by bus and a journey down the Amazon by boat. Both are inspiring accounts by two writers of their respective realisations of lifelong dreams. And, of course, having read them, I've added two more destinations to my wish list.

On a more sobering note, we were sad to learn of the untimely death of conservationist Lawrence Anthony in March this year (see his obituary on page 18). And as we went to press, we were outraged to hear that Thabo and Ntombi, the two-year-old rhino orphans he had adopted, were involved in an incident with poachers that left Thabo alive but injured. I had the privilege of meeting these two rhino when I visited Thula Thula and was amazed then at the presence of a 24-hour security guard plus a full-time minder (and qualified veterinary nurse) who loved the babies like her own. I now understand why. But if that wasn't enough to keep them safe, how can we possibly hope to protect those rhino that live in the wild? The fate of Thabo and Ntombi encapsulates the future of the planet – and should serve as a constant reminder of what is happening on our generation's watch. If, like us, you want to help fight the meaningless slaughter of these animals for their horn, go to www.lawrenceanthony.co.za.

Kemyn

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no foreign
lands. It is
the traveller
only who
is foreign’*

– ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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COVER Le Chardon Mountain Lodge,
Val d'Isère, France

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MEET DINOKENG

MEET GREG

Greg teaches pensioners to make, bottle and sell chilli jam and mango atchar in Hammanskraal, in Dinokeng, a premier business travel destination, only a short distance from Jo'burg and Pretoria. Greg also owns a bicycle safari company and is a permaculturalist. He chatted to us ...

Q What's the inspiration behind what you do?

A I have a strong desire to share my knowledge. That is why I train people in sustainable permaculture, so they can grow what they eat. It keeps them busy and it has made a massive difference to their lives, with some pensioners selling their produce.

Q What are you most proud of?

A Definitely my chilli jam, marmalade and mango atchar project. We use surplus veggies grown by the pensioners. I have taught more than 120 incredibly hardworking women to make, preserve, and sell it. They are now able to support their families with the proceeds from selling these products.

Q What makes these products special?

A Over and above the fact that they're organic and taste absolutely delicious, they're handmade with love and provide a sustainable income for a group of women who would otherwise live in poverty.

Q What makes you stay in Dinokeng?

A I was born and grew up in Hammanskraal and my family still lives here and even donated seeds and irrigation to the project. There is so much going on here! I am part of the community with lots to offer and am passionate about empowering others in any way that I can. It warms my heart that they call me *Ilala* here—a black man in a white skin.

Q How has your life changed since the Meet Dinokeng campaign?

A The sales of the atchar and jams has really taken off. We've had exposure to new markets and it's helping impoverished people in the area make a living. Interest in Dinokeng is growing and more tourists are coming on my cycle tours in the Dinokeng Game Reserve. Dinokeng is now a destination of choice for business events as there is a lot to see and do and it's not too far from Jo'burg and Pretoria.

A What's next?

Q I want to green the townships around Dinokeng even more and train larger groups, especially youngsters, in permaculture—it's a way of thinking and the best method to make your own food and earn money. I can see the future of Dinokeng and it's definitely green.

In Dinokeng tourism is all about travel with a conscience. It is about conducting tourism responsibly to ensure that locals benefit from your holiday, day trip or business event.

With rolling African bush, Dinokeng just a stone's throw from Pretoria and Joburg, is an ideal location for an eco-friendly bush experience plus a wide range of adventure activities and fine dining means there is something for everyone in Dinokeng.

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TOURISM



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SMART TRAVELLER

"My beer is
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says PAT BURRAGE,
MISS RHEINGOLD 1950

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL HERSE
COSTUME DESIGNED FOR MISS RHEINGOLD BY SOPHIE OF SAKS FIFTH AVENUE

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HEAD OVER HEELS
Europe's traditional beers have spawned a thousand imitations, including lagers such as Rheingold and Budweiser that are now considered American institutions

EUROPE'S GREAT BEER BURGS

IN THESE CITIES, BEER IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE

WORDS MARGARET LOFTUS

WITH A DECLARATION OF 'O'ZAPFT IS!' ('It's tapped!'), Munich's mayor kicks off Oktoberfest, first celebrated 200 years ago in honour of the marriage of Crown Prince Ludwig. The Wiesn (as locals call the fest) has since evolved into a 16-day toast to Bavaria's rich heritage, attracting millions and spawning spin-offs worldwide. But Munich is just one of the myriad cities where beer has been a part of life since the Middle Ages, when it was safer to drink than water. Parched? Here's where to get a taste.

COMMUNITY GARDENS *Munich*

The home of Oktoberfest has been hailed as one of the world's most liveable cities. Nowhere is the sense of *gemütlichkeit* – loosely translated, a communal warmth – felt more keenly than at the city's 36 beer gardens. City residents have been going for centuries to places such as the **Hirschgarten** or **Paulaner am Nockherberg** to enjoy a mug of Bavarian brew and a typical BYO picnic of salted white radish, pretzels and *obatzda* (a savoury mash of cheeses, onions and spices). The *biergarten* first sprouted on the banks of the chestnut tree-lined Isar River because it was the coolest place to store beer during summer months, when brewing was forbidden by Germany's purity laws.

Breweries in Munich, in fact, still follow 15th-century regulations stipulating that beer be brewed using only barley, hops and water. Among the city's famous institutions are the state-run **Hofbräuhaus**, on Old Town's Platzl, and **Augustiner Bräu**, known for its signature Helles (a golden lager). While Hofbräuhaus is sometimes overrun with tourists, the **Hofbräukeller** on Wiener Platz, a traditional Bavarian restaurant in a cellar with a beer garden outside, is frequented by local families. **Hofbräu-Festzelt** is the biggest beer tent at the Oktoberfest.

But during the approximately 16 days preceding the first Sunday in October, all the action shifts to the 14 massive beer tents – each accommodates thousands – outside the city. Entrance to Oktoberfest itself is free, but drinks (about R90 for a litre of beer), parade tickets and the obligatory souvenir stein can add up.

'Strangers may have to sidle up next to each other at long wooden tables – a good way to meet locals, whose initial brusqueness is usually tamed by successive refills'



VARIETY PACK *Brussels*

Centuries before Brussels became the staid, buttoned-up seat of the European Union bureaucracy, the city was a brewing mecca, known for its lambic, a bracingly tart and bone-dry brew naturally fermented with wild yeast. While the city has shed its provincial image to emerge as one of the Continent's coolest capitals, the beer continues to flow – some 600 varieties throughout the country, from bright *witbiers* to rich Trappist ales. Lambic still rules in Brussels, but most of what is consumed today is infused with fruit, like morello cherries. Sample multiple styles at the **Cantillon** brewery in the Anderlecht section.

Serious beer drinking is reserved for the city's ubiquitous cafés, where the beer menus are as thick as novellas. At the famed **Delirium Café** in the old town's Ilot Sacré, for instance, choose from more than 2 000 brews, including several vintage lambics, each served in its own special vessel. For a more streamlined beer list and a prime people-watching perch, try the art deco brasserie **A La Mort Subite** off the Grand Place with its 13th-century guild houses.

THE ORIGINAL *Prague*

Beer is deeply rooted in the Czech psyche. And, at less than R15 for a half-litre glass, it's a relative bargain. But this is no swill. In many ways, Czech beer is the standard by which all others are measured, including the original Budweiser (or 'Budvar') and Pilsner Urquell, which was developed in Plzen in 1842 in response to a 'beer party' – townspeople dumped barrels of beer to protest its poor quality. In Prague, however, Staropramen reigns. More steins of the brewery's crisp lager are hoisted in the capital's cavernous beer halls than just about any other brand. Traditionally, bars pour only one type of beer as advertised by the sign outside, like **U Dvou Koček**, rumoured to pull the tastiest Urquell in Prague. Another Prague institution is **U Fleku**, a rambling pub in New Town that has been brewing its own caramel-hued lager for 500 years. As at most crowded beer houses here, strangers may have to sidle up next to each other at long wooden tables – a good way to meet locals, whose initial brusqueness is usually tamed by successive refills, especially when the discussion veers toward beer.

BEYOND THE GREEN BOTTLE *Amsterdam*

The beer scene in the Dutch capital in 2012 goes well beyond the pale lager in the signature green bottle that put it on the map. Craft brewers have sprung up in the last 25 years, riffing on traditional lagers, Belgian-style beers and *bokbiers*, a strong malty German brew.

Most quaffing is done in 'brown cafés', the convivial pubs found in old neighbourhoods, such as the cosy **Café Golle**m near the Spui, where patrons duck in for a beer and a game of snooker. On sunny afternoons, young Amsterdammers point their bicycles toward the Leidseplein, the heart of the city's social scene, to grab an outdoor table and a frothy draft at one of the café terraces.

But craft beer connoisseurs make a beeline to **Brouwerij 't IJ**, a former public bathhouse. Regulars line up before the brew pub opens every afternoon to ensure their fill of the coveted elixirs, from the hoppy *pils* to the robust *ijbok*, before it closes at 8pm. Missed it? Some of the brewery's beers are poured in the Jordaan neighbourhood at the canal-side **Café 't Smalle**.

THE BLACK STUFF

THIS PAGE Guinness is as Irish as leprechauns and the shamrock opposite Beer gardens such as Munich's Hofbräu Keller are part of the fabric of German urban life



GUINNESS

ST. JAMES'S GATE BREWERY, DUBLIN

MOTHER'S MILK *Dublin*

Ireland boasts many a delicious brew, but none as near and dear to the hearts of Dubliners as the toasty stout with the thick creamy head that is Guinness. Practically everyone of drinking age has an opinion on where in town to get a proper pint of the black stuff, as it is known. But start at St. James's Gate Brewery, where Guinness has been brewed since 1759, for a look at an exhibition on the company's 250-year history, including the ads ('Guinness Is Good For You') that helped make it a household name. A free sample awaits at the seventh-floor Gravity Bar, worth a stop for its sweeping view of Dublin alone.

For that second pint, there are some 1 000 pubs in the city from which to choose, many concentrated along the cobblestone streets of Temple Bar, the city's cultural hub, where the *craic* is always lively and downright boisterous as night falls. Eamonn Doran's is famous for its live music – The Cranberries got their start here. The more intimate Palace Bar hosts occasional 'trad' Irish bands. Literary sorts head to Mulligan's to rub shoulders with locals and pay homage to former patron James Joyce.

MZANSI

MICROBREWERIES

Craft beer has gone viral in recent years, spreading well beyond its Boston birthplace as far afield as South Africa. Check out some of the homegrown brews on offer.

CAPE TOWN With an annual Cape Town Festival of Beer (www.capetownfestivalofbeer.co.za), the Mother City is a hot bed of microbrewing. Boston Breweries in Paarden Eiland brews Johnny Gold Weiss and a pumpkin-and-cinnamon flavoured Van Hunks Ale. Triggerfish Brewing in Somerset West makes mostly American-styled beers. Try its Ocean Potion, a pale ale with granadilla notes. Devil's Peak Brewing Co. produces four very fine ales, three American and one Belgian style. Watch out for Gallow's Hill Brewing Co. – winner of the SA National Homebrew champs and the SouthYeasters Home Brew 2012 competition with its Coffee Stout.

Darling Brew offers a brown ale called Native Ale, an ominously titled Bone Crusher (a Belgian-style *witbier*) and the bestselling Slow Beer Lager. Visit its tasting room, the Slow Quarter, in Darling. Napier Brewery makes a delightful, English-style bitter, a stout and a lager. And there's Mitchell's in Knysna, SA's oldest microbrewery, responsible for old favourites such as Bosun's Bitter and Forester's Lager.

KWAZULU-NATAL The Midlands is home to great craft-beer breweries such as Nottingham Road Brewing Company, famed for its Pickled Pig Porter brew. Not to be missed is the Robson's ale range brewed at the Shongweni Brewery: do try the award-winning West Coast Ale.

JOBURG Connoisseurs flock to the Ale House in Broederstroom once a year for The Annual Solstice Festival, a celebration of crafted beer. Make the trip to Muldersdrift where you'll find Gilroy Beer, a brew pub brewing some of the best small-batch beers around. – *Martin Tucker*

MODERN TROUBADOUR *This popular singer-songwriter's music takes him around the world*

Hard-driving roots rocker and slide guitar virtuoso Ben Harper came by his musical chops early. Growing up around his family's California music store, he received a grounding in folk and blues and later learned from Leonard Cohen, Taj Mahal and other famous musicians. Today the Grammy award-winning artist is known for such powerful songs as 'Shimmer & Shine' from *White Lies for Dark Times*, his most recent album with his band Relentless7. An impassioned activist, Harper's causes have included voter registration and supporting Burmese pro-democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi. See him perform online at Nat Geo Music (video.nationalgeographic.com/video/music).

DOES HEARING A SONG MAKE YOU WANT TO GO TO A PLACE?

Cuban music inspires me as much as anything and it is pulling me to get to Cuba. Songs and memories are the closest things we have to time travel, so I lean on those. I lean on the times of just touring around and meeting up with friends and going different places with them, a few stops and then moving on. Even talking about those times takes you right back.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST TRIP OUT OF THE US?

After high school, I went backpacking in Europe for a month. I had a guitar and was on the street, busking. It was an eye-opener. I spent a lot of time in Spain – Madrid, Barcelona, Seville. I went to Paris for the first time, made friends with other buskers. The street musicians in France are some of the most extraordinary on the planet. You can hear an incredible string quartet in the archways of the Louvre Square. Holland was wonderful as well. I think I made most of my money busking in Amsterdam. I ended up in Venice.

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED A STREET MUSICIAN WITH WHOM YOU WANTED TO PERFORM?

That happened once in Lausanne, Switzerland. I don't like to just sit around before a show. You get the sound check at 4 pm but don't play until 10, so you have an opportunity to go out for a walk and clear your head. I was doing that when I heard this incredible Eastern European klezmer band. I hung out with them for a while, then asked, 'Why don't you guys come open the show for me?' They said, 'We can't leave the street; we're going to lose money.' So I told them I'd pay them whatever they'd make in an hour. They agreed, but I don't think they had any idea what they were walking into. We were playing in a 5 000- or 10 000-seat place. They walked in, looked a bit surprised, and said, 'Okay, where do we set up?' They were complete pros.

HOW DO YOU GET AWAY FROM THE TOURIST SPOTS?

I get off the beaten path even if that means walking out my hotel door and saying, 'Okay, that looks like where the people are, so I'm going to go the other way.' I refuse to waste irretrievable hours in a hotel room. So many places we love are being engulfed by tourism. The last time I went to Turkey, I definitely noticed more of a Western influence than I was comfortable with. It's crucial that people hang on to what makes them unique.

YOU HAVE KIDS – ARE THEY TRAVELLING NOW?

All four of my kids have been to five or six continents each. I just took my teenage son to Japan, and it was the experience of my life. He is at that age where it means more than just going on the road with Dad. I showed him Shibuya, Shinjuku, Harajuku, all the different Tokyo hot spots. Then we bounced around the Fuji Rock Festival for a day, and hiked around Mount Fuji. It was a great moment for a father and son. I can't be away from my kids that long. It's not natural. It's not healthy. I can't focus when that happens.

HOW DOES TRAVEL CHANGE THE WAY KIDS LOOK AT THE WORLD?

I've met incredibly well-rounded kids who've never been outside their neighbourhood, so there are no rules. Kids are naturally intuitive and curious. And there's the fact that you can take a kid to the Trevi Fountain in Rome, but all they want to do is stare at Pinocchio in the window. At the same time, I've seen travel expand my kids' horizons. I'm hoping that will have a positive influence in their future, on the way they communicate with the world.

IF YOU HAD NOT BEEN A MUSICIAN, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN DOING?

My grandparents started a music store called the Folk Music Center in Claremont, California, in 1958. The Folk Music Center Museum opened in 1976. It has instruments and artefacts from around the world. I would most likely be helping to run and manage the store, working behind the counter every day. But I'm sure glad to be doing what I do.

– Keith Bellows



PHOTOGRAPH DANNY CLINCH

ALL ZIPPED UP

Thankfully, the days of the rather accurately named bum bag are long gone: Missibaba's pure leather giant scarab purse is just the thing for keeping your travel documents, cash and cards organised and easily accessible. From R1 300, www.missibaba.com



SUPER SMART CARD

On a recent trip to London, Kerry Fischer did a travel test on American Express's new GlobalTravel prepaid card. Here's her feedback

Although I had to go to my nearest Amex office to get the card, the visit was a one-off as you can keep the card for perpetuity and top it up again and again, as your currency never expires. But the real value in this card for me was that it allowed me to keep my travel money separate from my other accounts so I knew exactly what I was spending overseas and what I'd paid for it, as the exchange rate is set on the day of purchase.

How it works You receive a card (plus a back-up) for a fee of R100 – which has been waived for South Africans until 31 December 2012. This is then loaded with the currency of your choice, which sits in credit on the card and can be used for in-store purchases or to withdraw money from overseas ATMs wherever a standard American Express card would be accepted.

Pros You lock-in your exchange rate on the day you load the card and payment for goods or services is fee-free. The money is totally separate from your bank account, so if your card is skimmed overseas, it won't affect your bank accounts. Unlike other cards on offer, funds on the Global Travel Card never expire, so no leftover money is lost due to card expiry. There is also a host of discounts and special offers for cardholders specific to country and currency.

Cons Other cards have more extensive currency options so you'll have to turn elsewhere if you need something besides the big three – US dollar, euro or pound sterling. You're limited to just one currency per card and you may also find merchants who won't accept the Global Travel Card – and similar cards – because they don't have your name printed on them. Like all other money cards, withdrawing from ATMs will incur a service fee.



A KALEIDOSCOPE OF CAMERAS

The perfect travel camera should be as compact as possible, have a wide-angle optical zoom lens for landscape and group shots, and be fast enough to capture special holiday moments in an instant. The slender, stylish 16MP Nikon COOLPIX S3300 ticks all the boxes. It's available in a wide variety of colours – we dare you to find a travelling outfit you can't accessorise with one of these.

R1 499 from selected retailers; www.nikon.co.za



SMOOTH SAILING AHEAD

Cruise lines that cater to kids on board as well as in port WORDS CELESTE MOURE

Galápagos

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ENDEAVOUR

Lindblad specialises in active expeditions, and in the Galápagos that means snorkelling, hiking and kayaking almost daily. The ship features outside-facing cabins and is outfitted for true exploration: rubber ducks, a glass-bottomed boat, underwater cameras and video microscopes with HD screens to view sea turtles, pods of orcas and marine iguanas. When not learning the art of knot-tying or stargazing, kids can sketch whales in their journals, learn to photograph fur seals or make beaded necklaces crafted from the islands' recycled paper waste.

Ports of call North Seymour, Rabida, Fernandina, Isabela, Santiago, Santa Cruz, San Cristobal.

Passengers 96. **Contact** www.expeditions.com.

South Africa

MSC SINFONIA OR MSC OPERA

Not sure your tots will deal with being on board for long periods? Then a three-night weekend break to Portuguese Island is ideal. Cabins have child-friendly bunk beds, or opt for the connecting cabins on the MSC Opera – offered at reduced rates for families. Children under 18 cruise and eat for free if sharing with parents and pay only port charges. No formal babysitting is included but arrangements can be made with the cabin stewards. There's a full activity centre in the playroom, with swimming and mini-golf on offer. Island stops include a rubber-duck ride to the beach and a day ashore, while the older child can get to grips with ocean life on a snorkelling trip just off the reef at Inhaca Island.

Ports of call Portuguese Island, Barra Lodge, Maputo. **Passengers** 2 199 each.

Contact www.msccruises.com.

Mediterranean

NORWEGIAN EPIC

If dressing up and getting stuck at a table with strangers isn't your idea of fun, then NCL's Freestyle Cruising concept was designed for you: restaurant tables are unassigned and there are plenty of cabin options (family staterooms accommodate four). On board, families can bowl, make pizza or hit the spa together (with 'ice cream manicures' for kids). Meanwhile, supervised age-specific activities (treasure hunts, crafts, storytelling) give adults alone time. Offshore excursions, like hiking Mount Vesuvius in Naples or creating your own perfume in Nice, will appeal to older kids.

Ports of call Rome, Florence, Naples, Barcelona. **Passengers** 4 100. **Contact** www.ncl.com.

Alaska

CELEBRITY CENTURY

The Century is one of the smallest vessels from this plush mid-priced cruise line where well-heeled families take advantage of connecting staterooms, naturalist-led lecture series and tableside cooking. On board, expect the usual activities at the kids' clubs – karaoke, sports, movie nights. On land, kids get a real taste of local flavour and history with opportunities to meet native totem carvers and learn about the life of sled dogs at a musher's camp.

Ports of call Icy Strait, Vancouver, Point Juneau, Ketchikan. **Passengers** 1 814.

Contact www.celebritycruises.com.

Baja, Mexico

SAFARI QUEST

Rope swinging off the yacht's stern? Check. Burro trail rides along a craggy Baja Peninsula peak? Check. For select 'Kids in Nature' sailings expedition leaders tailor activities to children's interests. The Sea of Cortez is known as the aquarium of the world, and this eight-day sail allows families to snorkel with sea lions and paddle alongside dolphins. The comfy yacht is furnished with flat-screen TVs and heated bathroom floors, and the chef cooks with local fish and produce.

Ports of call La Paz, Isla Partida, Bahia Agua Verde, Isla Coyote, Isla San Francisco.

Passengers 22. **Contact** www.yachtnw.com/safariquest.

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BOOKS

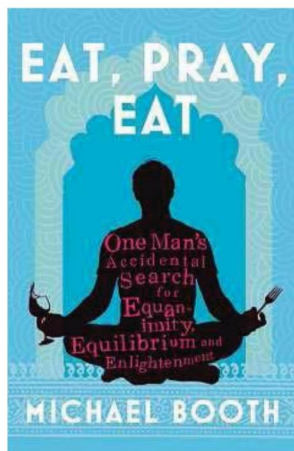
India and Africa are the focus of these great reads, plus we have two books to give away

EAT, PRAY, EAT

BY MICHAEL BOOTH
(Jonathan Cape)

Approaching his forties and more tired of life than the Grinch was of Christmas, Michael Booth and his family set off on a culinary and spiritual journey of India. The Booth family criss-cross the country on a three-month trip from Delhi to Mysore – skipping the middle bit as Dad the hypochondriac is petrified of catching malaria.

This entertaining travelogue is a journey of the mind and the stomach, as they sample a variety of the local cuisines, visit shrines and temples and finally take up yoga. Here at last the author can finally come to grips with all his failures and perhaps embark on the long path to enlightenment – if only he could stop moaning for even one minute. – *Delené van der Lugt*



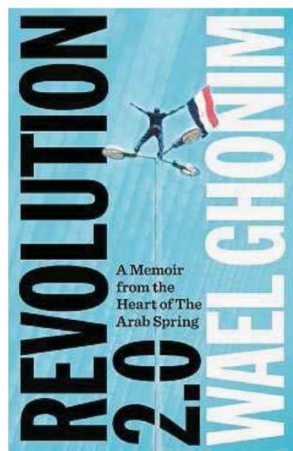
REVOLUTION 2.0

BY WAEL GHONIM
(Fourth Estate)

Think of Egypt and chances are you will think of Cleopatra and King Tut. Little attention is paid to modern-day Egypt: the world was taken by surprise when a quick-fire revolution deposed Egyptian strongman Hosni Mubarak (29 years in power) in February last year after just 18 days of protest. None were more surprised than Mubarak himself.

A young Egyptian employed by Google, Wael Ghonim shared the disillusionment felt by his peers. He found a way to channel his anger, setting up a Facebook page that became the rallying point of the youth. Using the voice of the 'Facebook Generation', rather than activist-speak, and employing online marketing and sales strategies, Ghonim gently coaxed young Egyptians to raise their voices online and eventually to take to the streets.

Ghonim's story unfolds at a somewhat slower pace than one might expect as he painstakingly documents the Facebook page's growth during 2010. But by early 2011, 'Silent Stands' to register disapproval had become 'Days of Anger', protest via social media (Web 2.0) had translated into 'Revolution 2.0' and action had shifted from the internet to the street. Who said the Facebook Generation is lazy and apathetic? – *Richard Maguire*



GEEK NATION: HOW INDIAN SCIENCE IS TAKING OVER THE WORLD

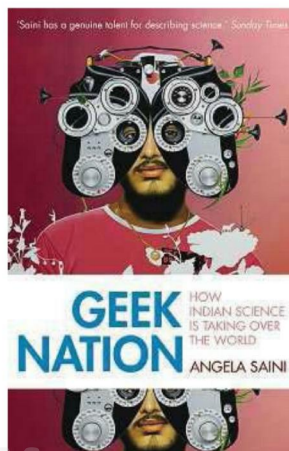
BY ANGELA SAINI
(Hodder & Stoughton)

On her Geek odyssey to India, science journalist Angela Saini discovers that a tolerance for different and even downright wacky ideas is key to the country's scientific progress. She finds everything from the futuristic town of Lavasa where everything will be run by computers to a 'mind-reading machine' used by Mumbai police to convict criminals.

India has more engineers and scientists than any other nation but, alas, building communication satellites, engineering bananas with a long shelf-life, finding a cure for tuberculosis and experimenting with thorium reactors costs money, which is not readily available.

But even with this lack of national resources, Saini finds in India a pioneering spirit and a sense of urgency that are more about solving the country's problems than taking over the world. And a willingness to share, as proven by the online Open Source Drug Discovery Project, where Indian scientists freely exchange medical research with peers from around the world.

Geek Nation is as entertaining as it is informative and a recommended armchair-travel book with substance. – *Pieter van der Lugt*



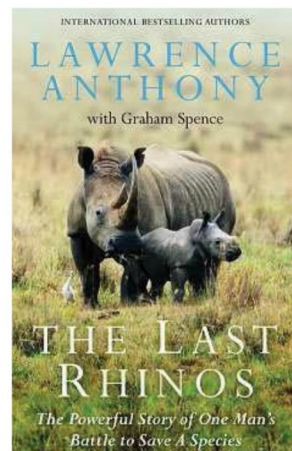
THE LAST RHINOS

BY LAWRENCE ANTHONY
WITH GRAHAM SPENCE
(Sidjwick & Jackson)

Lawrence Anthony's discovery that there are only a handful of northern white rhinos left in the wild – living in Garamba National Park, a World Heritage site in The Democratic Republic of Congo – stuns him into action. His plan? To remove the rhinos to a place of safety where they can breed with rhinos bred in captivity to ensure the genetic survival of the species. However the rhinos are living in a remote part of the park controlled by the infamous Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by Joseph Kony. Lawrence travels to the DRC to attempt to persuade the government to intervene but is thwarted by red tape and apathy. Astonishingly, he makes direct contact with the LRA and wins a historic agreement from them to safeguard the rhinos (as well as the okapi and the pygmy Congo giraffe). As a neutral, nonpolitical party, Lawrence gains the trust of Kony's high commanders and travels to their camps in the jungle to negotiate on the rhinos, child soldiers and peace talks. This book is a fascinating and poignant read about a truly incredible man.

– *Kerryn Fischer*

WIN One of two copies of *The Last Rhinos*. SMS 'NGT book', your name and address to 33970*.



*SMSes cost R1.50. FREE MINUTES DO NOT APPLY. THE COMPETITION CLOSES ON 4 SEPTEMBER 2012

LITTLE HOUSE IN
THE BIG WOODS
Summer cottages
like this one dot
the banks of
Lake Haapavesi

NORDIC TRACKS

Helsinki – World Design Capital 2012 and continental Europe's northernmost city – is a worthy destination for urban-culture vultures. While you're there, though, make a side trip into the countryside for a broader awareness of Finland's multifaceted appeal. In the Itä-Suomi region, where the country bulges eastward into Russia like a swollen lip, land often seems to get swallowed by the endless lakes. The lakeside cottage, or mökki, is as simple as it is inviting, politely deferring to nature's leading role. On long summer evenings, the sun hovers impossibly on the horizon, keeping the forest soaked in vermillion light until the wee hours. The cool waters of Lake Haapavesi beckon for a post-sauna dip. Don't see a sauna? There's probably one just beyond the next curve: there are two million of them in this land of five million people.

A swarm of opera fans descends on the nearby five-hotel town of Savonlinna every July for the world-class festival held in one of Scandinavia's best-preserved medieval castles, so a quiet mökki may be the best place to stay. Pick up some kalakukko (fish pie), traditional juniper beer and a can of mozzie spray, or wait until January and bring cross-country skis. Savonlinna is reached by train – just half a day from Helsinki – but the region is best explored by car and canoe. – Doug Lansky

Lawrence Anthony

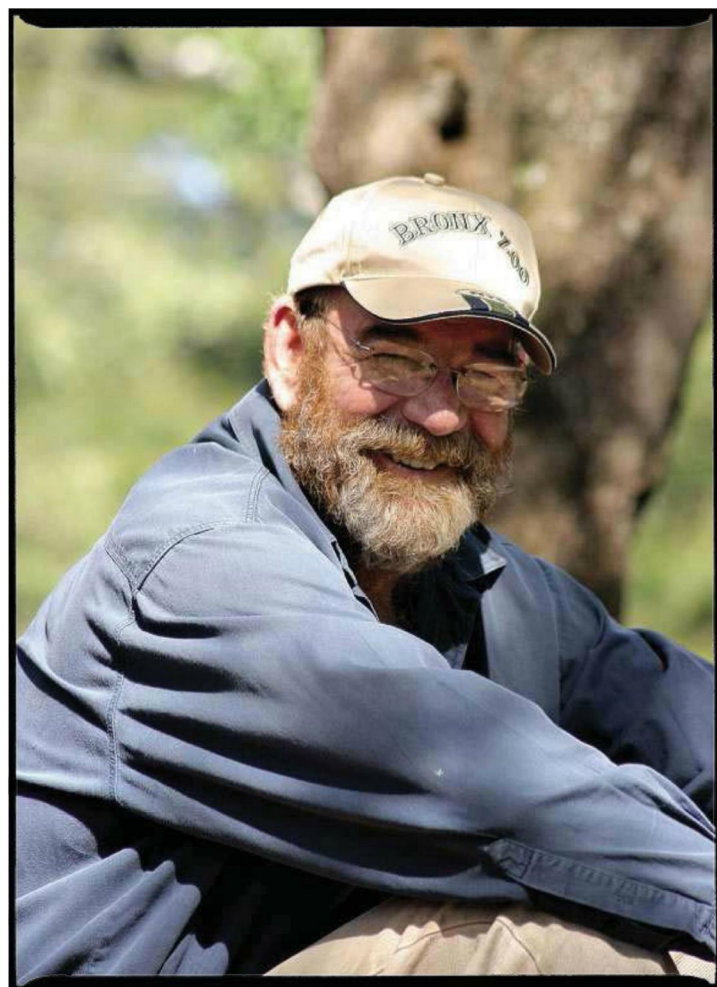
I was lucky enough to meet the late conservationist Lawrence Anthony about two years ago and shortly afterwards to visit Thula Thula, his beautiful home and game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal

My first impressions of Lawrence were of a maverick, larger-than-life personality whose disarming and somewhat dishevelled appearance (khaki bush attire and a cigarette firmly planted in his mouth) belied a *tour de force* in conservation. He was down to earth, funny and quite obviously someone who did things differently, and who got things done! His immense knowledge of and passion for conservation made him a key initiator in a landmark agreement that saw tribal lands merge with game reserves in northern KwaZulu-Natal. This was rooted in his belief that by rebuilding the historical relationship between the Zulu people and the bush, the future of the region's wildlife populations would be secured.

Lawrence lived a full, rich life and was known for his daring exploits. In 2003 he travelled to Iraq during the American Invasion to rescue the traumatised animals at the Baghdad Zoo. As chronicled in his book *Babylon's Ark*, Lawrence saved the remaining animals and also succeeded in getting both American and Iraqi armed forces to down weapons and help him do it. It was this unpredictability coupled with a 'get it done' attitude and gift for relating to all people on all levels that ensured these remarkable achievements.

For Lawrence, conservation was his life's work and he wasn't afraid to muck in. His second book, *The Elephant Whisperer*, tells how he adopted a herd of traumatised elephants onto his Zululand game reserve. 'They were a difficult bunch, no question about it,' Anthony said at the time. 'Delinquents every one ... but I could see good in them.' His decision to gain their trust and persuade them through words and gestures paid off when he concentrated on Nana, the matriarch, and painstakingly changed her behaviour. His knowledge of elephant-to-elephant communication via infrasound (their own private wavelength of low-pitched tummy rumbles) together with his experiences with Nana made for a fascinating, deeply insightful account of these magnificent animals. It was to be a rich and lifelong relationship. In fact, Lawrence and his wife, Françoise, became so close to the elephants that on occasions they had to chase them out of their living room. But Lawrence was always quick to point out that it was a mutually beneficial relationship, for he would seek them out when in need of clarity and direction in other areas of his life. 'If elephants are just great big pieces of ambient meat,' he said, 'why does one feel so good in their presence?'

As much a diplomat as a conservationist, Lawrence took on the plight of the northern white rhino and in his quest to save them from extinction in the wild, he unwittingly found himself negotiating peace and cooperative agreements between rebel groups in The Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006. 'The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was encamped in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which at the time was the last refuge of the northern white rhino,' Anthony said last year. Thwarted by



African bureaucracy, he found himself travelling into the jungle to try to persuade the LRA not to kill the game guards or the last few rhinos. 'I ended up staying with leaders in their secret jungle camps. My discussions and attempts to persuade the LRA to save the rhino expanded into child soldiers, peace talks and other matters.'

Sadly, *The Last Rhinos*, his book about these adventures, was published posthumously in April, a month after Lawrence's untimely death at the age of 61. As the founder of the Earth Organization (www.earthorganization.org) and the recipient of many conservation awards, Lawrence has left an incredible legacy. While I mourn the passing of this fascinating conservationist and humanitarian, I am heartened to know that his work will continue: Françoise and his sons Dylan and Jason are all actively involved in the running of the reserve and the various conservation initiatives. 'We miss him terribly,' says Françoise, 'but we will carry on his legacy at Thula Thula.'

Personally, I will also remember him for his ready laugh and a unique (and often humorous) view on the world. I laughed when I read that besides sitting on the governing council of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science, Lawrence was also a member of the Church of Scientology. 'Not because I believe in aliens and all of that stuff,' he apparently explained. 'But because I like its account of the nature of body and spirit.' Typical.

— Kerry Fischer

BEEN ANYWHERE INTERESTING LATELY?

*Kingsley Holgate
& family*



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Happy Valley

*IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR GREAT SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING IN A RESORT
THAT OFFERS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE, WITH SNOW LONG INTO
THE SEASON, HEAD TO VAL D'ISÈRE, SAYS KERRY N FISCHER*



HIT THE PISTE

The family-owned ski-in, ski-out Le Chardon Mountain Lodge is a luxury chalet that includes all meals and an open bar in its weekly rate. An added bonus is its proximity to the slopes



The view from my window at Le Chardon Mountain Lodge was unspeakably perfect: the remote Manchet valley with its dark fir trees cloaked in snow beneath the majestic peaks of Col de l'Iseran, France's highest mountain pass (at 2 770m), was all mine. There was not another building in sight, just the absolute silence that comes with a high altitude and the arrival of fresh snow. It was my first morning in Val d'Isère and I was thankful that I'd left my curtains open the night before so that I could soak up the solitude of dawn as it broke across this incredible mountain vista.

APRÈS-SKI GLEE
Whatever your après-ski preference – Ibiza on the slopes at La Folie Douce (opposite) or champagne on ice back at Le Chardon Mountain Lodge (this page) – Val d'Isère has it covered



WHITE ON WHITE

Although you can risk poor snow conditions if you book a ski holiday late in the season, Val d'Isère is considered a 'sure-fire' destination as it's high up and always has plenty of snow right through April



Tucked in at the base of the mountains, the village of Val d'Isère is surprisingly true to its Alpine architectural roots. There are few of the purpose-built concrete structures you find in other resorts. Instead, most of the buildings adhere to a centuries-old tradition of wood and stone that make for a low-key village vibe. And Le Chardon Mountain Lodge, in the hamlet of La Legettaz, my home for the next few days, had taken this to heart, using hundred-year-old Savoyard wood beams with cherry, pear, apple, walnut and oak panelling throughout.

All five luxury-catered chalets in Le Chardon Mountain Lodge's portfolio, can individually accommodate between 8 to 20 guests. A family-owned affair that runs like a well-oiled machine, it delivers a seamless sequence of gourmet meals, roaring fires and champagne on ice, and an attention to detail more complete than in other ski resorts I'd visited. But to be fair, I was easily pleased. I'd had my first full night's sleep in months in a sumptuous and super-cosy suite as I'd wisely left my two young sons at home with my husband. I'd arrived late in April just as the season was about to end and I'd been generously rewarded for my long-haul efforts with fresh snowfalls and ample space on the slopes.

Having perused the piste map's 90 ski lifts, two snowboard parks, a children's village, 300km of marked pistes, 12 slope-side restaurants and wonderful off-piste terrain on the plane, I couldn't help thinking that it looked like a snow-clad version of snakes and ladders. Now, how hard could that be for someone who hadn't skied in a decade?

But then Val d'Isère had come highly recommended by seasoned skiers and snowboarders who saw me for the beginner I was. The resort boasts five beginner zones, two of which are '*ski tranquille*' areas. And although I'd read that more than half of the runs were green or blue, I soon discovered that this was hotly contested by those who felt that some were too steep, narrow or bumpy, and would be blue or black in other resorts. Nonetheless, my experience at Val d'Isère was a seemingly endless supply of gentle slopes that allowed me to build up my confidence with ease.

In fact, I'd surprised myself on the slopes the previous afternoon. I was thrilled not just by the physicality of skiing but also by my steady sense of balance. When did that happen? Sticking to the Solaise area that is accessible directly from the village, I initially relied heavily upon



the snow plough position, but I soon found myself wanting to go faster and a little higher as I cut confidently into the pristine slopes with my skis. Known for some of the best open powder fields of any resort in the world, the skiing and snowboarding area around Val d'Isère and Tignes is known as L'Espace Killy, after Val's most famous resident Jean Claude Killy, a World Cup ski racer. And there's plenty to keep advanced skiers on their toes. Val d'Isère is the only resort in recent times to have hosted the Olympic and World Cup Downhill competitions as well as the Alpine Ski World Championships, thanks to the legendary OK run on La Face de Belvedere and La Forêt, a super-challenging run that cuts through trees and is ideal for mogul fans.

And while other resorts seem to attract a specific crowd, such as Courchevel's fashionistas (there's a Chanel shop in the village), red-faced revellers in Austria's St Anton and shoulder-to-shoulder royalty at Lech, Val d'Isère is thankfully more laid-back and sporty. There's a good mix of snowboarders and skiers, families and groups, experienced and beginners, all united by their passion for skiing. And après-ski nightlife is a big part of Val's allure.

This starts early, particularly at La Folie Douce next to the La Daille gondola that gets going at about 2pm. I could see why this self-styled open-air club is called 'Ibiza on the slopes', with musicians playing on the roof while the crowds, still in ski goggles and full ski gear, bopped away beneath them. Styled like an old dairy cooperative, it sources ingredients from local farmers and artisanal producers and is a great place to grab lunch: choose from the budget Nuovo Self, a self-service cafeteria, or the fabulous and more formal La Fruitière, where the waitrons are dressed as milkmen and -women, and food is served in unusual ways (such as the spaghetti Bolognese I saw served in a glass jar). I can recommend the house special, *feuilleté savoyard*, a melted local cheese with ham sandwiched in a fluffy pastry crust and served on a slate platter – delicious! If it's freezing and you want to sit outdoors, *pas de problème*, they provide special bodysuits too.

And of course there are many pleasures to temper the adrenaline of skiing at Val d'Isère. Shopping in the village after a devilish cup of hot chocolate at heavenly bakery Maison Chevallot is a must. You'll soon understand why the owner holds a coveted Meilleur Ouvrier de France for pastry and confections! My usual routine was to head straight from the slopes to Le Chardon for a massage (included in the weekly rate) and a nap. Then I'd avail myself of another five-course culinary adventure by chef Paul Websdale, followed by a brisk walk to the Morris Bar, where a live band plays every night (and where Snow Patrol played before they were famous). My only regret? That I couldn't stay longer, and that I never experienced Dicks Tea Bar, a Val institution that stays open until 4am. But then, you've got to have a reason to go back.

Le Chardon Mountain Lodges An eight-person lodge is from R13 125 per person for seven nights including gourmet meals and an open bar; www.mantiscollection.com.

Ski pass information www.valdisere.com. **Ski hire** from R265 a day for skis and poles; R95 a day for boots; www.sweet-ski.com.

GETTING THERE SwissAir flies from Joburg to Geneva via Frankfurt from R6 939 return; www.swiss.com. Travellers who're taking a ski break from London can get the overnight Eurostar Ski Train from St Pancras Station to Bourg Saint Maurice at the bottom of the mountain, from R1 966 return; www.eurostar.com. From Bourg, it's a 40-minute taxi ride to Val.



ALPINE IDYLL

With an efficient lift system, 300 kilometres of piste runs and 12 slope-side restaurants, pristine surrounds and excellent accommodation choices, Val d'Isère has everything you need for an incredible ski holiday





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your favourite childhood storybook

EATING OUT IN LONDON

KNOWING WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK IN THIS INCREDIBLE CITY CAN BE A DAUNTING AND VERY EXPENSIVE PROSPECT. TRY A FEW OF OUR FAVOURITE PLACES

WORDS KERRY N FISCHER

WITH A REPUTATION AS A THOROUGHLY INNOVATIVE culinary capital, London has loads to offer. When travelling on the rand, however, the problem is where to eat and drink at a price that won't give you anxiety-induced indigestion. Here is my pick of the bunch that will give you an authentic sense of place plus the satisfaction of knowing you've tapped into hot local favourites (daunting exchange rate notwithstanding).

brunch**MEGAN'S DELI AND RESTAURANT**

This unassuming spot on fashionable King's Road oozes charm with its rustic, homely vibe and well-priced menu. Whether you're after an almond croissant (R25) or French toast with crispy bacon and maple syrup (R85), it'll be good and delivered with grace. And it has that rarity in London, a beautiful back garden in which to eat in summer. **571 King's Road, SW6 2EB, www.megansrestaurant.com**

lunch**NOPI**

Tucked behind Regent Street, Yotam Ottolenghi's restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. A more formal eating area on the top floor gives way to a canteen-style area in the basement. You're encouraged to order three savoury dishes (on average R105 to R145 each) to share with everyone at the table. Yes, this does include the stranger sitting next to you, but I drew the line when my cardamom rice pudding arrived – the bowl was too small to share. **21–22 Marylebone Street, W1B 5NE, www.nopi-restaurant.com**

afternoon tea**COCOMAYA**

Prepare for sensory overload in this other-worldly chocolate shop and blonde wood-panelled bakery in Marylebone, where the interiors are a must in themselves. Hot chocolate and cinnamon buns come highly recommended, as do the Bramley apple ganache and petits fours. **12 Connaught St, W2 2AF, www.cocomaya.co.uk**

evening drink**THE WONDER BAR, SELFRIDGES & CO.**

When shopping on Oxford Street gets too much I slope off to The Wonder Bar for a good glass of wine and delicious green olives and nuts. With a great selection of more than 50 varieties of wine available through their enomatic machines, you can sample a 'taste' (25ml), a glass (125ml) or a carafe (175ml). It also has an excellent menu of crustacean, charcuterie and fine cheese boards. **400 Oxford St, W1A 1AB, www.selfridges.com**

dinner**THE DELAUNAY, THE ALDWYCH**

This all-day café restaurant with a grand European-style interior is a treat. The excellent à la carte menu includes old-style Germanic dishes such as borscht, goulash and Salzburg soufflé. Not that I ordered anything remotely Germanic – I had a simple avocado, radish and butter lettuce salad (R100) followed by sautéed wild mushrooms on white polenta (R152). A great evening out that won't cost a fortune. **55 The Aldwych, WC2B 4BB, www.thedelaunay.com**

GRANGER & CO.

I never miss breakfast at Bill Granger's in Westbourne Grove. His airy, light-filled restaurant is a great place to collect your thoughts for the day. Without fail, I go for the five-grain porridge with buttered apples and brown sugar (R65) followed by sweetcorn fritters and roast tomatoes with spinach (R154). You can't book, so it's best to get there early. **175 Westbourne Grove, W11 2SB, www.grangerandco.com**

PETERSHAM NURSERIES CAFÉ

This fabled teahouse serves tea, coffee and cake all day, as well as an Italian-inspired lunch menu: think really good roast chicken with a steamed cauliflower salad, frittatta and salad, fresh soup and mozzarella salad. The antique conservatory setting is magical – straight out of the pages of a Beatrix Potter book; get there early for a table. The adjacent Michelin-starred café has a great three-course set menu for lunch at R369. **Church Lane, off Petersham Road, Richmond, www.petershamnurseries.com**

HUMMINGBIRD BAKERY

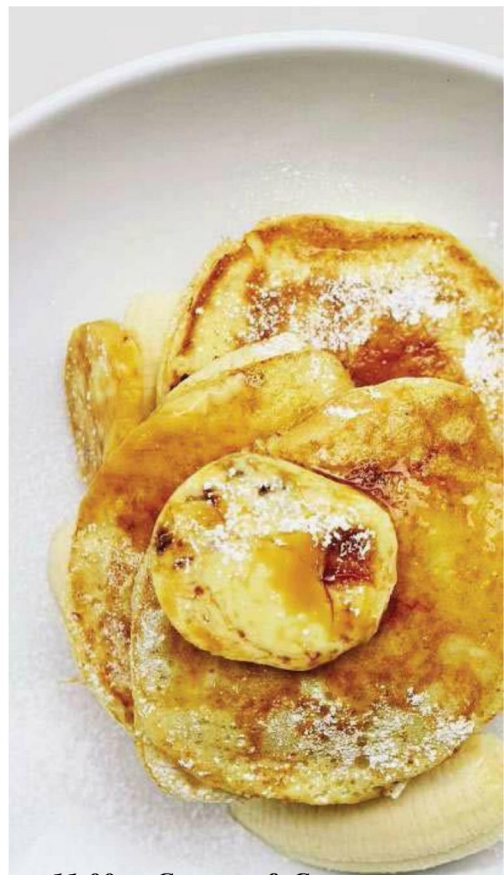
This is the place to catch your breath if you're visiting the Natural History Museum or the V&A in South Kensington. On a corner of the Old Brompton Road and two minutes from the tube station, it offers Red Velvet cupcakes, Key Lime pie and a host of other American cakes and desserts. **47 Old Brompton Rd, SW7 3JP, www.hummingbirdbakery.com**

TERROIRS

This centrally located wine bar boasts a great choice of over 200 wines from artisan growers in France and Italy, plus 'natural wines' (no added acid, sugar or sulphur) made from biodynamically grown organic grapes. What makes it such a find is that the food is just as good. Served in the basement, the menu includes cheese platters, fish soup, *salade paysanne*, smoked duck and braised rabbit leg. Booking essential. **5 William IV Street, WC 2N, www.terroirswinebar.com**

SHOREDITCH HOUSE, SHOREDITCH

Admittedly you have to stay at Shoreditch House to eat here but I'd say it's worth it for the experience of this private member's club (public room rates are from R2 390) in London's East End. The House Kitchen serves incredibly well priced and delicious meals at a series of communal dining tables. I can vouch for the zucchini fritti (R39), the octopus, celery and potato salad (R103) and the crab ravioli (R116). **Ebor St, Shoreditch, E1 6AW, www.shoreditchhouse.com**

**11:00 at Granger & Co.****16:00 at the Hummingbird Bakery**



13:00 at Petersham Nurseries Café



16:00 at Cocomaya



18:00 at The Wonder Bar, Selfridges



20:00 at The Delaunay

**TOP
TEN**

Traveller Events

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WORDS DELENÉ VAN DER LUGT

1 *Grahamstown National Arts Festival*

The hardly sleepy student town of Grahamstown really comes to life during the National Arts Festival – in a celebration of song, dance and creativity. 28 June to 8 July; www.nafest.co.za

2 *46th Montreux Jazz Festival*

Besides Bob Dylan, Switzerland's premiere festival offers up top acts from the Ting Tings to Tony Bennett. Tickets sell out well in advance and hotel prices shoot up, so book ahead. 29 June to 14 July; www.montreuxjazz.com

3 *The Masterpiece London Fair*

Held in the grounds of Royal Hospital Chelsea, this is one for the connoisseur. Showcasing pieces from antiques to contemporary, it includes exhibits from Bugati, Cartier and Cognac to Picasso. Experience fine dining at the iconic Le Caprice. 30 June to 5 July; www.masterpiecefair.com

4 *Festa Major de Gràcia*

With elaborate decorations decorating the streets of Gràcia, this festival is a Barcelona favourite. Catch live music (classical jazz to hard rock), exhibitions, workshops, sporting activities, street markets, parades and many activities specifically for kids. 15 to 21 August; www.festamajordegracia.cat

5 ***Motovun Film Festival, Croatia***
This Croatian medieval village may be most famous for its architecture, but you can balance out an exhausting sightseeing schedule with a breather in an air-conditioned theatre for an event nicknamed the 'Woodstock of film'.
28 July to 1 August;
www.motovunfilmfestival.com

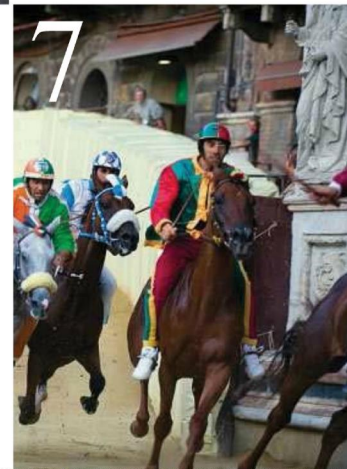


Burning Man

Thousands of pilgrims gather in Nevada's Black Rock Desert for what is possibly the Holy Grail of all festivals. For one wild week participants create a community dedicated to art, self-expression and self-reliance. A week later they depart, leaving not a trace of Black Rock City. 27 August to 3 September; www.burningman.com

Il Palio di Siena

Thousands of spectators cram into this Italian square from early morning to watch 10 frenzied bareback riders make a 90-second dash around the Piazza del Campo. It's free, so arrive very early or miss out. The race takes place at 5pm but there are all-day festivities. 2 July and 16 August; www.thesienapalio.com



8 Olympics 2012 In London but can't get tickets for the Games? No worries. Concert stages, big screens and a pedestrian area have been centred around Trafalgar Square. Visitors can also watch live action at free sites in Hyde Park, Victoria Park, Waltham Forest, Woolwich and Potters Fields. 27 July to 12 August; www.london2012.com

9 Qingdao International Beer Festival Whether you are a serious drinker or a casual weekend enthusiast, you'll see the best of China's beer-drinking culture at this event near Shilaoren in the Laoshan district. *Gan bei!* (Bottoms up!) 11 to 26 August; www.qingdaonese.com

10 THE BEST ON SHOW

La Triennale 2012: Intense Proximity Catch the cream of Africa's artistic talent at the newly renovated Palais de Tokyo and other venues in Paris. Nicholas Hlobo will show new works on canvas, Guy Tillim photographs from his 'Second Nature' series and Meschac Gaba 'The Marriage Room' from his Museum for Contemporary African Art. Until 26 August; www.latriennale.org
Herb Ritts: LA Style The Getty Museum in Los Angeles showcases one of America's most celebrated fashion and pop-culture photographers. Some of the shutterbug's most 'Hollywoodised' prints, Polaroids, magazine covers and commercial works (many of them captured in iconic black and white) will be on display. Until 26 August; www.getty.edu

PHOTOGRAPHS GREATSTOCK/CORBIS; SCOTT LONDON

48 hours in...

SÃO PAULO, A CITY THAT REQUIRES YOU TO DO A LITTLE MORE THAN JUST ARRIVE. YOU'RE DEALING, AFTER ALL, WITH ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULOUS CITIES, MUCH OF IT A HARD-EDGED URBAN SPRAWL WITH LITTLE TO OFFER. FOCUS ON DOWNTOWN (CENTRO) AND THE AREA SOUTHWEST OF THAT (JARDINS AND THE WEALTHY SURROUNDING NEIGHBOURHOODS) AND YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF WONDERING THANKFULLY WHY YOU AREN'T SURROUNDED BY TOURISTS AND THEIR CAMERAS, AS YOU WOULD BE IN PARIS OR EVEN BUENOS AIRES

WORDS GEORGIA BLACK

SHOP

If it's a 'you've-got-to-be-kidding' shopping experience you're after, go to **Daslu** (Avenida Chedid Jafet 131, Vila Olímpia), a five-floor department store with 10 coffee and champagne bars, in-house fashion shows, housekeepers in French maid's uniforms tidying the shelves and a heli-pad on the roof for customers who can't face the traffic.

The best shopping discovery, though, is Brazilian furniture, which you'll find dotted around in studios and malls (try the **D&D Design Centre**, Av das Nações Unidas 12555). The iconic look has its roots in the 1950s, when Oscar Niemeyer started designing ultramodern buildings that demanded a new kind of interior style. Soon, a distinctly Brazilian, architectural furniture look emerged, led by 'the father of Brazilian furniture' Sergio Rodrigues. Still designing at 85, Rodrigues (who is also an architect) has a cult following and his famous 'Mole' chair is part of the MoMA's permanent collection. Another architect-turned-designer, Carlos Motta has been an advocate for recycling and

HIGH POINT

Sweeping São Paulo views from the **Edifício Italia** rooftop restaurant





sustainability in furniture since the 1970s, when he started collecting driftwood along São Paulo's coast and transforming it into furniture. His low-key São Paulo studio (**Atelier Carlos Motta**, Rua Aspicuelta 121, Vila Madalena) is a hidden gem, testament to Motta's ability to alternate between light and heavy woods and designs. With luck you'll meet Motta himself and see that his work reflects his nature – authentic, relaxed and connected to the earth. (He is a passionate surfer and his son shapes surfboards in the next-door studio.)

STAY

São Paulo didn't feature as a designer destination until 2001, when its first luxury hotel opened. The **Emiliano** (Rua Oscar Freire 384) was quickly followed by the **Fasano** (Rua Vittorio Fasano 88), which, with its elegant tower design, personalised butler service and affiliation with the top restaurants in the city (all owned by the Fasano group), is said to be the swankiest place to stay in Latin America. The **Hotel Unique** (Avenida Brigadeiro Luis Antonio), designed by local architect Ruy Ohtake and known as the Watermelon for its amazing curve, is where to stay if you prefer a crowd that's more hip than hush. At night it all happens at the rooftop **Skye Bar**, a regular hangout for Paulisto models (who are given drinks at half price, apparently). Up there with the city views, red-mosaic lap pool and wild cactus landscaping, you'll feel like you're on the set of a James Bond movie.

EAT

Sao Paulo's vast immigrant population (most notably Italian, Lebanese and Japanese) is the reason that the city has world-famous ethnic food. For the best of the best go to award-winning **Arábia** (Rua Haddock Lobo 1397) for the meze; **Jun Sakamoto** (Rua Lisboa 55) for Japanese; and **Restaurante Fasano** (Rua Vittoria Fasano 88) for modern Italian. For something more traditional, young and fun, head to the bohemian Via Madalena district and choose from the Brazilian-style restaurants. **Salve Jorge** (Rua Aspicuelta 544) bustles with all types, makes its own beer and has excellent food. Order a *choppe* (draught beer) and a plate of *coxinhas* (chicken croquettes), then share a *picanha na pedra* (literally 'meat on a rock') – steak brought to your table sizzling on an iron plate, fatty side down so the fat crisps while the meat stays rare.





URBAN PULSE

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

São Paulo's restaurants are world-famous for their delicious ethnic fare; Frevo diner is a São Paulo institution; check out the city's design stores for mid-century-style furniture; teens dressed as zombies throng the streets on the Day of the Dead



Spotlight on Brasília

THREE WAYS TO GET TO KNOW THIS SURPRISING CITY

BY ALEX ROBINSON

Even repeat visitors to Brazil seldom make it to the country's shimmering concrete-and-glass capital, Brasília, but they should. Considered one of the 20th-century's grandest and most ambitious new cities, Brasília was built from scratch in the empty central plateau of the country by Le Corbusier-influenced city planner Lúcio Costa, architect Oscar Niemeyer and landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx. In 1987 UNESCO awarded Brasília World Heritage status for its 'innovative and imaginative' architecture and design.

Get an eyeful of architecture

Oscar Niemeyer's modernist edifices remain the city's only real sights, but there are many to view. Along the central avenue called the **Monumental Axis** sit his striking government buildings, such as the **Congresso Nacional**, which houses the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The **Palácio do Itamaraty** serves as the reception palace of the ministry of foreign affairs. Photograph it at dusk with its gently lit, tapering modernist columns and arches mirrored in a rectangular moat. The **Metropolitan Cathedral**'s swooping white concrete beams form a modernist crown of thorns (above);

mosaic stained glass windows glow in a tranquil interior. Niemeyer's most recent works include the **Museu Nacional**, which hosts visiting exhibitions in a space-age hemisphere reached by a sinuous runway, and the **Biblioteca Nacional**, a 366-metre-long white rectangle faced with a concrete lattice.

Dine with diplomats

Star chef Lucas Fernandez Arteaga runs the kitchen at diplomats' favourite **Patú Anú** – an aerie tucked away on the shores of Lago Paranoá. The menu specialises in game dishes such as wild boar or crocodile, served with ingredients such as cassava. The terrace has lake and city views.

Soak in nature

The **National Park of Brasília** claims to be the world's largest natural area (185 square kilometres) inside an urban district. Hikers can choose between two trails, the Capivara and the Cristal, which wind through forests and typical Brazilian savannahs. Look out for rare birds, such as the toco toucan, and endangered animals like the maned wolf. End at one of the popular mineral-spring pools for a relaxing soak.



IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

THIS PAGE Aerial view of the Amazon
rainforest in Peru

OPPOSITE The iridescent wings of the
Urania leilus moth – endemic to
tropical South America east of the
Andes – attract collectors



the lost world

MORE THAN 50 YEARS AFTER HE FIRST HEARD THE WORD 'AMAZON',
KEITH BELLOWS EXPLORES WHERE TRAVELLERS RARELY GO

WorldMagazine

When I was a child my father spun the big globe beside my bed.

'Just point your finger to make it stop,' he said. 'Maybe you'll go where it lands someday.' It was his way of teaching me geography. The globe stopped at places like Cairo and Easter Island, Kansas City and Sydney. When it stopped on the Amazon rainforest, it was prophetic. My father loved the Amazon, which he visited in the mid-1940s. Throughout his life he would speak of it reverently. To him, nothing on Earth was quite like the Amazon. More than 50 years later I'm in the ragged Amazon town of Nauta in the region of Loreto, which makes up a third of Peru. Now, at the peak of the rainy season, Loreto is 80 percent flooded, which is why most of the area's inhabitants live in homes built on stilts. The temperature is in the 30s, and I look longingly at the black waters of the Marañón River, a tributary of the Amazon River. I badly want to swim.

'Go for it, if you like,' says Francesco Galli Zugaro, a friend who has invited me to join him on his boat, the *Aqua*. He grins. 'People do it. Me, no. I'd be worried about the fish that look for intimate openings.'

The Amazon is the world's largest river by volume, carving through a basin that, if superimposed on North America, would cover almost all of the United States. It still harbours lost tribes like the one spotted a few years ago on the Peru-Brazil border that brandished arrows at a research plane and supposedly is home to legendary creatures like Sach'amama, a giant black boa, and an old dwarf named Chullachaqui, who, our driver to Nauta told us, can take many devious forms in order to lure people deeper and deeper into the forest until they are lost. 'There are many weird things in this jungle,' he said.

The pure scale of the Amazon is astonishing: about 45 kilometres wide when the water is at its highest, almost a kilometre when it drops to its lowest ebb. At its most swollen during the rainy season, the mouth of the river can be 483 kilometres across, dumping over 55 000 cubic metres of water per second into the ocean – 60 times the discharge of the Nile and 11 times that of the Mississippi.

The *Aqua*, built to Francesco's specifications by the Peruvian Navy,

towers above the water like a citified condo. It and the *Aria* – a bigger sister ship – are two of the handful of large boats running regular trips down the Peruvian Amazon. The alternatives: industrial banana boats that haul river cargo and offer a hammock for the night. The *Aqua* accommodates 24 travellers and a 24-person crew that includes pilots and naturalists who know the jungle intimately.

Most visitors to the region stay in landlocked lodges, limiting the area they can explore. But the *Aqua* has the advantage of ranging much farther afield, using its small skiffs twice daily to penetrate deep into previously inaccessible jungle. In the next four days it will take us roughly 450 kilometres, ending the journey in Iquitos.

The rainy season came two months early this year.

Fed by an average annual downfall of more than 3 048 millimetres, the river rises and falls over nine metres throughout the calendar in Peru and more in Brazil. Only the wildlife sense what the skies will bring. As we settle into our cabins, curtains of lightning accompany window-rattling gusts and the skies drive rain down hard. The *Aqua* is not anchored; instead it is lashed securely to riverbank trees.

My fellow travellers and I dine off a menu prepared by Pedro Miguel Schiaffino, one of Peru's top chefs and owner of Malabar, a prestigious Lima restaurant. We are told to expect Peruvian dishes, South American wines and local ingredients. Juices like cocona and *camu camu*. Fresh heart-of-palm soup with avocado purée. Regional pastries like *aguaje* muffins and *sachaculantro* and sweet chilli bread. And such entrées as Amazon bass *tiradito* and tiger catfish ceviche. After we eat, we huddle in the boat's top-deck lounge in front of a huge picture window. 'Some people ask me if we have TV on board,' says Francesco. 'You're looking at it.' He motions to the plate glass. 'A moving window on the Amazon.'

Later, as I settle to sleep, I consider what lies ahead. We are in Pacaya Samiria, the second largest rainforest reserve in Peru and one of the





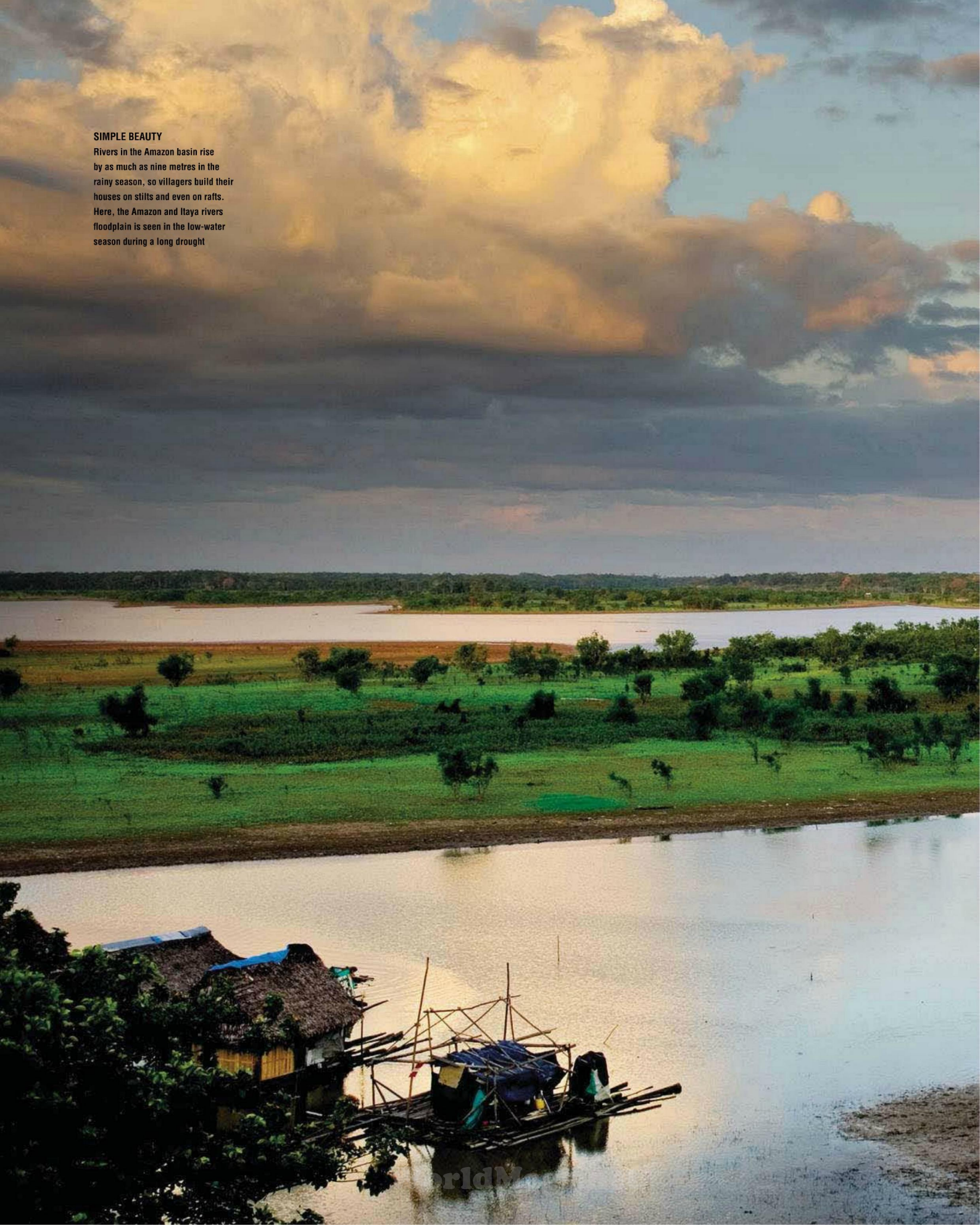
TOUCH WOOD

OPPOSITE PAGE Great egrets roosting along the Yanallpa River are among the countless wildlife species seen on the Aqua Expeditions tour

THIS PAGE Local boys climb the buttresses of a giant kapok tree; found throughout the Amazon River basin, its timber used for making pallets and plywood

SIMPLE BEAUTY

Rivers in the Amazon basin rise by as much as nine metres in the rainy season, so villagers build their houses on stilts and even on rafts. Here, the Amazon and Itaya rivers floodplain is seen in the low-water season during a long drought





world's most diverse. It is home to anaconda, manatees, pink dolphins, jaguars, anteaters, giant otters, tarantulas and more than 500 species of birds. Accessible only by water or air, it is a two-million-hectare monster with only 92 125 inhabitants and fewer than 6 000 tourists last year.

We steam through the night, lulled by the rolling gait of the boat. Light creeps up by 5.30am, and I am treated to a double-wide-window view of a rainforest smorgasbord of mangroves and palms. On our first day in the reserve we motor in a seven-metre-long skiff powered by an ecofriendly four-stroke, 40-horsepower outboard. Photographer Richard Olsenius and I share the boat with our guide/naturalist Juan Tejada, Francesco, a driver, and the Aull family from Los Angeles – Robert, Jan and high-schooler Nick.

We pass a shoreline that is constantly being reshaped – a landmark submerged over nine metres one month might suddenly reappear the next. 'Maps are just a way to locate villages that will eventually vanish underwater,' says Francesco. We turn into the Yanallpa, a narrow ribbon of water that at low season would be unnavigable. We will go up almost 12 kilometres, covering territory seen by only a handful of non-Peruvians. Juan makes kissing sounds to coax out red howler monkeys. The sound coming from the wall of jungle is deafening. Juan machetes through suffocating brush. Excitedly, he swings around, machine-gunning bird names as he points this way and that: purple-throated euphonia, white-headed marsh tyrant, Amazonian royal flycatcher. He could spot a ladybird at 300 metres, but on that first morning we miss a lot of what he sees.

We stop at the base of a ficus and crane eyes upward. Visible near its crest are the heads of four brown monkeys, slyly peeking down at us. Twenty minutes later we watch a saddleback tamarin monkey leaping, vaulting and dancing on tiny boughs in search of insects. 'Very unusual to see that species up so close,' says Juan giddily. More wildness follows: a caiman lizard lounging on a tree branch, a snail kite, hanging bromeliads, clouds of ani birds with their shiny blue-black feathers, scarlet bursts of passionflowers at water's edge, glades of birchlike cecropia trees.

We cut the engines and float, soaking up the soundtrack of the Amazon: layers and layers of hoots, warbles, grunts, yelps, buzzes, clicks, fish leaps and a chiming background choir that is mesmerising. 'A lot of birds and animals are territorial,' Juan explains. 'Stop here and you will hear one set of sounds, then a kilometre down river, you'll hear something completely different.'

I am under siege by mosquitoes and have forgotten my insect repellent. Juan grins and nudges the boat close to an immense termite nest. 'This will help you,' he says. 'Go on, put your hands in there.' The nest swarms.

'Are you sure?' I ask.

He nods.

I plunge my hands into the nest. When I yank them out they are covered with an undulating blanket of insects.

'Rub them on your face and arms,' he says.

I look at him in disbelief, then lather up. The result? No stings, no stickiness. Just a sweet aroma and as the day progresses, no mosquitoes.

'There are a lot of secrets in these jungles,' says Francesco. In fact, we are floating through a medical treasure house. 'Countless medicinal plants are still waiting to be discovered here,' Juan says. Curare is taken from hanging lianas. The bark of the *uña de gato* vine contains anti-inflammatory alkaloids. Indeed, researchers now hunt out shamans and village elders in search of new discoveries. 'The rainforest is the future of the world,' he adds.

The jungle is a matryoshka doll, revealing itself one layer at a time. As the days roll on our eyes adjust and we begin to see things for ourselves: a horned screamer – 'flies like a vulture, runs like a dog and tastes like chicken,' says Juan – and the monk saki monkeys, which locals call Michael Jackson monkeys for their sashaying style and white-glove paws. We learn to recognise the bark of the toucan, the distant roar of a howler monkey and the banshee cry of a hoatzin.

The river is virtually empty, save for the occasional dugout canoe or banana boat. But one morning we encounter a skittish crew on a flotilla of bound logs. They are armed. 'They live on that for two or three weeks, make a little fire, keep animals and move those logs to Iquitos,' says Francesco.

'Is it illegal?' I ask.

He shrugs. 'It gets more legal the closer it gets to Iquitos.'

Francesco tells me that just 15 park rangers and a ragtag assembly of deputies and volunteers patrol the reserve – hardly enough to keep poachers and illegal loggers from scratching out a living. 'All they have is a dugout, a chainsaw and an engine.'

The next day we are trolling down El Dorado Stream

in search of pink dolphins. Up to three metres long, they have a hump rather than a dorsal fin and an unfused neck vertebra that allows them to turn their heads 180 degrees. Local legend holds that the creatures shape-shift at night into spectral figures that enter villages on foot to steal the loveliest girls. 'That's why,' says Juan, 'women ask strangers to remove their hats – to see if they have a blowhole.'

We find the dolphins where muddy-brown and tannin-black waters meet and their diet of crayfish and shrimp is the most plentiful. The creatures are playful, cresting not much higher than the depth of their hump, following the thrum of the engines, growing pinker as they become more excited. They blow and dive, crisscrossing from one side of the boat to the other, clearly using their sonar to coordinate a seemingly calculated strategy to bedevil those trying to get the perfect photo. Eventually, the dolphins peel off and disappear.

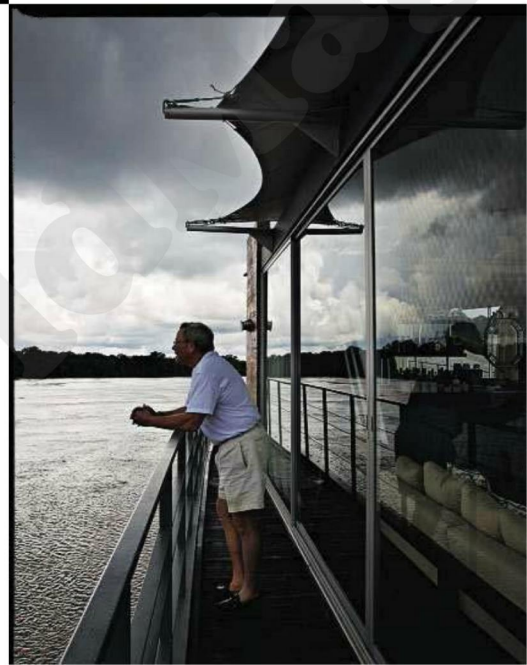
Later, we see a three-toed sloth rigidly still, ensconced in a 12-metre-high crook of a tree as nonchalantly as if it were in an armchair. Sloths digest leaves slowly to extract as many nutrients as possible, descending only once every week or two to do their business before finding another leafy branch to chew on.

As the days pass and we steadily move down river, we begin to encounter more of the river's characters. We pass a ranger boat pulling two dugout canoes. 'Poachers,' says Juan. Standing regally at the bow is the object of their efforts – a blue and yellow macaw. It has been confiscated; the poachers will be fined or jailed. We encounter a villager with a two-and-half-metre-long baby anaconda that he coils around his arm before setting it free into the water. We see two



WHERE THE TRULY WILD THINGS ARE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Night monkeys have big eyes to see in the dark; red-bellied piranhas; a mangrove black hawk scans for prey; this Catesby's snail-eater snake (*Dipsas catesbyi*) blends into a heliconia plant; a passenger surveys the Ucayali River, one of the Amazon's many tributaries, from the gangway of the *Aqua*; a piranha is a predator that itself makes for a tasty meal; blue-and-yellow macaw (*Ara ararauna*); local legend has it that the pink dolphin shape-shifts at night to lure away young girls; the Dorado stream leads deep into the forest



FLOATING REFUGE

The *Aqua* lies anchored on a serene tributary, where passengers can eat a gourmet supper, discuss the day's adventures in the lounge, then fall asleep to the sounds of the jungle. This riverboat is designed top to bottom for optimal sightseeing

*WE WATCH BY SPOTLIGHT
AS A TARANTULA DISPATCHES
A MOTH IN SECONDS.
WE FEAR WHAT WE HAD HEARD:
THAT A DEADLY FER-DE-LANCE
VIPER WOULD DROP FROM A BRANCH*

fishermen scooping up their catch. 'These men use another secret of the forests,' Juan tells me, pointing to a catahua tree. 'For centuries, we have used it to make dugout canoes. The sap contains a compound similar to sulphuric acid. They mash it with leaves and spread it on the water. When the fish eat it, they're stunned – and easily captured.'

We stop at Lago Prado, a village of 14 dilapidated, stilted, open structures that house 120 villagers, half of them children. Chickens, a black pig and runty dogs crowd the settlement. The mayor wears shorts, takkies and a baseball cap. Two children walk about wearing jaguar skins. The kids sing us songs and accept simple gifts – pens, T-shirts, paper. Perhaps one percent will make it to university. Most won't finish primary school, having to work alongside their parents so they can survive this world of constant water.

We leave to fish for piranha in shaded glades using a crude pole with a simple hook baited with beef. When I get a hit, I hoist aboard a red-bellied piranha, the most ferocious meat-eater of the species. It drops off the hook and clatters menacingly along the length of the boat, driving us all up onto the seats until the guide subdues it with his foot. When another passenger snags a baby, the guide ghoulishly demonstrates the breed's atavistic cannibalism. He offers it to the bigger piranha, which takes less than three seconds to eat through its victim. I later dine on my catch despite having to navigate its unpleasant array of pointed weaponry. The fish is mostly bone, but the flesh is light and tasty.

Night is falling. And we nose deeper and deeper into the dense underbrush, discovering lake after lake, the sulphurous scent of decay suffusing the air. We are on another Amazon tributary, the Picaya River. 'We are in the middle of something bigger than I can comprehend,' says Richard. We enter a grove of entangled vines, stark, tilted trees and sheets of dense bush. 'Where do we go from here?' asks Jan. Francesco assures us that the guide knows. And the boat pushes still deeper into the maze, through great slabs of water lettuce.

'This is the heart of darkness,' says Francesco. 'We really are far in now.'

'Just as long as we know how to get out,' I say, realising that soon it will be pitch black. Then I wonder: 'Do you ever break down out here?'

'Nah, never,' Francesco replies. But then he tells me the story of when he scouted the black lagoons of the Pacaya Samiria reserve to map out an itinerary for the *Aqua*. He went by speedboat with a photographer, a cook, a guide and a skiff pilot. 'Even the skiff pilot didn't know exactly where we were going,' Francesco recalls. 'Then the skiff broke down and we had to row six hours to the main river to catch the current. We had no radio, no navigation, no mosquito nettings. We had one broken oar to use as a paddle.' They were eventually rescued, but the tale is not reassuring.

We hit a stretch where, as if a zip has been pulled, the water opens into a boulevard through the lettuce. We surge forward past stands of grey trees, dribbling thick, ropey lianas. But mostly we motor past endless kilometres of green – blue green, yellow green, purple green,

so many variations of green that the most masterly painter would be defeated trying to capture them. We encounter more pink dolphins and linger with them as the sun dips lower. We begin home, stopping at an immense lake for a sunset that saturates the horizon with otherworldly colours. We all silently think: can the guide really find his way back through this labyrinth?

For 45 minutes we scud down a wide stretch of the Picaya, with only a small spotlight to cut the pitch black, accompanied by aerial squadrons of bats. Suddenly, Juan signals the driver to slow. He has spotted telltale red dots glowing at the waterline. We nose in under dense ferns. Juan scoops up a half-metre-long baby caiman lizard. It writhes, terrified, as we gently stroke its rubbery skin. Juan returns it to the water and we move on.

Suddenly we slow, sluice right and enter an eerie glade flooded with insects. Imagine a haunted house amusement ride under a starless sky: we inch our way through the watery canal that earlier in the day we could at least see. A tiny tree frog drops on Jan's head. She screams. Feathery foliage tickles our faces. We watch by spotlight as a tarantula dispatches a moth in seconds. We fear what we had heard: that a deadly fer-de-lance viper would drop from a branch. Every few minutes the boat grinds to a halt as the prop becomes entangled in water plants. We hold our breath: will we break down? Miraculously we emerge. We see the boat. We are home.

It's our last night on the river. We are at the mouth of Supay Creek when a pod of pink dolphins appears. They trail the boat, showing more of themselves than at any time since we arrived. It's as if they are saying goodbye. We play with them for an hour, then head down river. We encounter more cascades of unimaginably complex greens, filigreed with vines, immense plants that look like abstract sculptures, waterfalls of leaves, sprawling acacias and towering wood leviathans, with deep caverns cut into the plant wall that signal the opening of another tributary. We motor in silence for kilometres, surveying a new variant of the astonishing landscape we have witnessed in the past four days.

'You have a feeling back here that you're the first to see this,' says Francesco. 'And you're not far off.' The scene is truly primordial; *Jurassic Park* meets Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lost World*. We end the day at Supay Lake just as sunset approaches. The driver positions the boat off a small island that catches the dying rays, as if someone has switched on a light bulb inside the foliage. It glows, and the colours that have dazzled us all week take on a new vibrancy, straight from the paintbox of the gods. We all whoop. We know what we're seeing is truly Amazonian. And then the sun lowers. The light flattens. And we are left with something merely extraordinary.

And I'm left knowing that the Amazon, now my Amazon, can't be much different than the one that so touched my father more than a half century ago.

Keith Bellows is the editor of US National Geographic Traveler

GETTING THERE Fly from Joburg to Iquitos in Peru via Buenos Aires or São Paulo with SAA, and then via Lima with LAN Airways, from R14 353 return, www.travelstart.co.za. Travelling times vary from about 28 to 35 hours or more. Aqua Expeditions will meet you in Iquitos. A three-night Amazon Discovery Cruise is from R20 625; www.aquaexpeditions.com.

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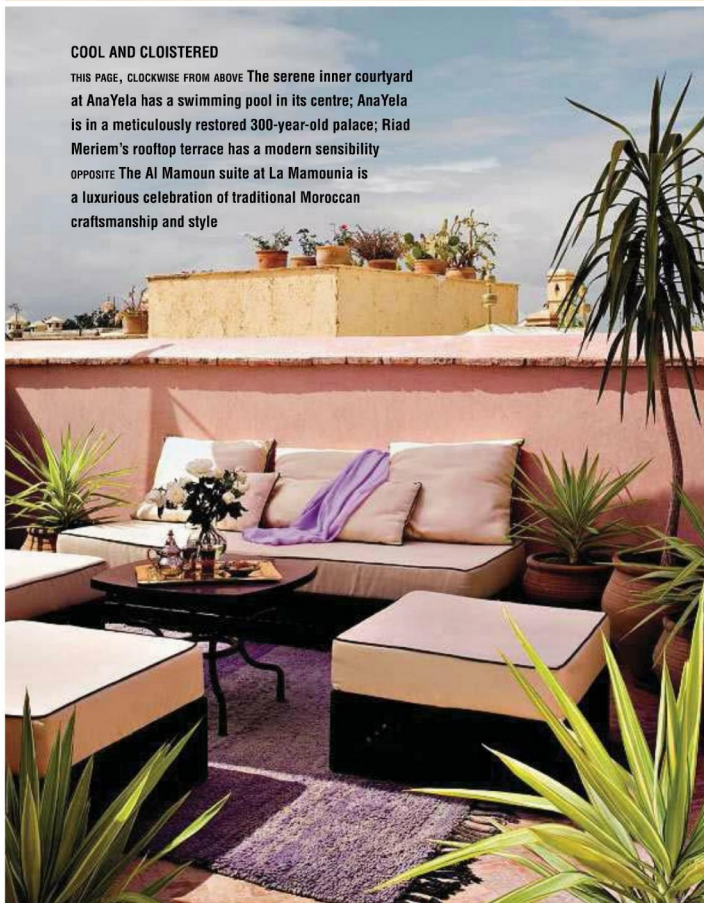
WORDS **RAPHAEL KADUSHIN**

Marrakech is famous for being a welcoming crossroads, where Moroccan merchants, French stylists and global bohemians converge. But the mediaeval heart of the city, the walled medina itself, seemed like an insular secret until the last decade, when a wave of largely European expatriates began converting the district's riads into guesthouses. Defined as traditional houses with interior garden courtyards, riads typically offer five to 10 rooms. Stays include breakfast, feature optional excursions and ultimately serve a higher mission than mere hospitality. Dedicated to reviving the authentic culture of the medina, as much conservators as lodgings, the best of the restored properties foster a soulful sense of place.



COOL AND CLOISTERED

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The serene inner courtyard at AnaYela has a swimming pool in its centre; AnaYela is in a meticulously restored 300-year-old palace; Riad Meriem's rooftop terrace has a modern sensibility
OPPOSITE The Al Mamoun suite at La Mamounia is a luxurious celebration of traditional Moroccan craftsmanship and style



The template of the classic riad may be the **AnaYela** (from R2 900; www.anayela.com). The 18th-century riad is buried so deep in the northern medina that you'll need a guide to lead the way. A serene white courtyard is anchored by a small pool, and the rooms are highlighted by silver beds lit from below so they seem to levitate. Follow the riad's chef to the market to pick out items for the evening's dinner.

A more theatrical version of authenticity is found at the **Angsana Riad Si Said** (from R1 380; www.angsana.com). A 10-minute walk from the medina's central Djemaa El Fna, the riad, composed of two 19th-century houses, echoes the square's exuberance. At its heart is a courtyard garden that is the site of an epic Saturday Arabian Night, fully loaded with belly dancers, Moroccan musicians and pastille-to-couscous buffet.

The **Riad Al Massarah** (from R938; www.riadalmassarah.com) near the Majorelle Garden doesn't take a purist approach. The six bedrooms offer TVs and WiFi (unusual for riads) and a touch of modernist European design, exemplified by jewel-tone bedspreads. But the fireplaces, roof terrace views of the Atlas Mountains and a menu of excursions (including a horse-drawn carriage ride through the medina) won't let you forget where you are.

The **Riad Meriem** (from R925; www.riadmeriem.com) near the Musée de Marrakech features New York designer Thomas Hays's unexpected fusion of African art and Asian textiles. **Riad Flam** (from R1 750; www.riadflam.com) near Djemaa El Fna border-hops as well by adding Syrian mirrors, Egyptian chandeliers and Balinese panels to a Moroccan backdrop.

Family-friendly and charming, **Riad Clémentine** (from R866; www.riadclementine.com) offers excellent service. The owners are more than happy to produce an early supper for kids; for special occasions like birthdays they will put on a real little celebration, with music and a beautiful cake.

MARRAKECH REVIVAL The Mamounia is restored to its 1920s elegance.

Before the riad explosion, travellers looking for an indulgent stay gravitated to La Mamounia (from R4 600; www.mamounia.com), the legendary hotel built just west of the medina in 1923. The hotel lured notables like Winston Churchill with its baroque version of Moroccan deco decor. Reopened in September 2009, the hotel has undergone a multimillion Rand redesign that plays with light and dark, so that sensual, plum-coloured public spaces lead to bright tiled courtyards. The design integrates the hotel's new attractions: 2 500m² spa, glass-walled fitness centre, two ozone-heated swimming pools, acres of gardens and zealously refurbished guest rooms.



Johannesburg

	ATHOLPLACE	FAIRLAWNS HOTEL	SURREAL ECO BOUTIQUE HOTEL & SPA	RADISSON BLU GAUTRAIN
				
WHERE?	Super central, just off Katherine Street in the leafy suburb of Athol, adjacent to Sandton.	In Morningside Manor. Easy access from the airport via the Marlboro N3 off-ramp. Close to Sandton, Woodmead, Sunninghill and Rivonia.	In the heart of Bryanston, 10 minutes' drive from Sandton.	Opposite the Gautrain station in Sandton.
WHY GO?	For the chance to sleep under Frette bed linen in your elegant, spacious suite with comfy day bed and balcony overlooking the beautiful garden and pool.	Even though it's situated in the business area, it's very quiet and peaceful thanks to the size of the estate and the lush gardens that surround the buildings.	It's a treat for a business traveller after a long day as it offers exclusive, ultradiscreet facilities set in a gorgeous garden.	No need to hire a car for your Joburg trip: just schedule your meetings at the fabulous Slow in the City lounge (www.slowinthecity.co.za) downstairs in the hotel.
VIBE?	Relaxed, uberluxurious home away from home – if your home is in Clifton, Monaco or some other ultraluxury destination.	Luxurious but not overly so. The more contemporary additions appear to be more lavish.	Luxurious contemporary Asian design with impeccable service, excellent facilities and an eco-conscious attitude to boot.	Functional convenience and efficiency with a touch of style.
BUSINESS FACILITIES?	Free WiFi, plus every room has a desk. The library is used as a conference facility, and business dinners alfresco or in the dining area are popular.	Free WiFi, separate conference facility with six meeting rooms that can accommodate from 10 to 100 delegates, with state-of-the-art equipment.	Free WiFi, secretarial service, 24-hour room service. Both the restaurant and the Terrace can accommodate up to 35 people seated.	Free WiFi, 10 conference rooms that accommodate from 2 to 50 delegates with state-of-the-art equipment, plus a spectacular rooftop space (formerly ZAR nightclub).
CLIENTELE?	Movie stars, international financiers and those given to a life of luxury.	Both business and holiday travellers.	Business and pleasure travellers alike.	Delegates to conferences at the nearby Sandton Convention Centre.
EATING & DRINKING?	A standard breakfast is included. Enjoy complimentary canapés and drinks before dinner, where the chef will prepare a meal to your order – or host your own dinner party.	A full breakfast buffet. In the evenings, there is a fine-dining <i>à la carte</i> menu that I didn't get to try. They also do high tea.	The intimate in-house restaurant Kai Lan serves up delicious Asian-fusion cuisine.	David Higgs, South Africa's Chef of the Year in 2011, is resident at the hotel's fabulous Central One restaurant.
HIGH POINT?	Feeling like you're an international jet-setter for a few days.	The very spacious rooms (I stayed in a Grande Chateau suite) and quietness.	The Hot Stone and Marble Massage alfresco in a tranquil curtained area.	Getting to and from the airport has never been this easy.
LOW POINT?	None.	Below average coffee (the barista didn't know what a flat white is). The spa looked like it needed a revamp.	None.	The service left a little to be desired. Location isn't everything.
PRICE?	From R4 000 per person; www.atholplace.co.za – Jason Probert	R3 950 per suite; www.fairlawns.co.za – Morné Fischer	From R3 400 for a double room; www.surrealhotel.co.za – Robyn Alexander	From R2 600 per person; www.radissonblu.com – JP

**Best
for
business**

We round up eight hotels that are the business, especially if you are travelling for work

THE RESIDENCE



In Houghton, and therefore easy access to Sandton for those using the Gautrain and to the N1 to Pretoria.

It's peaceful, intimate and beautiful, with just five sumptuous suites in a lush garden setting with a tennis court and pool.

Pomp and splendour define this hotel, with over-the-top colonial table settings and beautifully decorated rooms.

Free WiFi. A conference facility that can accommodate up to 35 people is currently under construction. The Skybar on the roof is also a good place to have business drinks.

International tourists, business travellers and expats.

The breakfast was good, with a special welcome from the chef, and I could order off the menu. The breakfast area overlooks the garden and tennis court. Coffee was average.

The spacious room and friendly staff, plus the tennis court!

After a power failure at night, little was done to warm up the chilly room; the gas fireplace wasn't working.

R2 155 per room;
www.theresidence.co.za

– MF

RADISSON BLU SANDTON



On Rivonia Road, just down the road from the JSE.

There are no better views in Joburg: on a clear day you can see all the way to the Magaliesberg.

Afro-Scandi chic. Think Arne Jacobsen meets Haldane Martin.

Free WiFi, eight modern meeting rooms that can accommodate from 10 to 260 delegates, all with state-of-the-art equipment.

International business travellers on corporate expense accounts.

Linguine with lobster and springbok carpaccio are just some of the delicious ways to enjoy the sparkling lights of Sandton from the 13th-floor restaurant.

Waking up to sunrise over the most spectacular view in Johannesburg.

It's a little too far to take a stroll to Sandton City after a day's meetings.

From R3 050 per person;
www.radissonblu.com

– JP

PROTEA FIRE & ICE



The new section of Melrose Arch – not overlooking the square – very close to the M1.

Get away from Sandton and enjoy the buzz of Jozi's latest shopping district.

OTT Hollywood glam noir. Think Schrager – co-founder of Studio 54 and the man credited with the 'boutique hotel' concept – on a budget.

Free WiFi, three conference rooms and three meeting rooms that can seat up to 180 delegates, with state-of-the-art equipment.

Hipsters, BEE Bros and BFFs in Jozi for business.

Don't miss out on a decadent ice-cream shake from the incredible selection at the Milkshake Bar.

Post-work drinks meetings in the hippest hotel bar in town.

The restaurant menu is not inspiring.

From R1 254 per person;
www.proteahotels.com

– JP

WINSTON HOTEL



Around the corner from the Rosebank Gautrain station.

Feel like you've escaped to the country to relax – when you're actually in the centre of it all.

A boutique hotel with a chilled, eclectic and stylish mix of the colonial and modern.

Free WiFi, the hotel can accommodate up to 34 people seated and 80 people for an informal function.

International travellers en route to safari destinations.

Unique dishes that combine South African cuisine with influences from North Africa and the Mediterranean.

Sipping lemon-and-herb iced water on the patio at the end of the day.

Having to leave.

From R1 560 per person;
www.thewinstonhotel.co.za

– JP

Ed's choice

NOW YOU SEE IT, SOON YOU WON'T

Quirky temporary hotels are popping up all over the place

First there was the pod-hotel concept, prefab units with basic amenities and a miniscule footprint, which can be placed anywhere. They make economic sense, are affordable and appeal to green travellers and adventurous types alike. Prototypes included the wee Hotel Everland that spent two years on the top of Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Taking this one step further is the pop-up hotel, which gives new meaning to the phrase 'you had to be there'.

These offer minimalist temporary lodgings in special locations before they are taken down. Or moved, as in the case of **The Pop-Up Hotel**. This family-owned project is based in rural Somerset, England, and the idea is to provide 'luxury accommodation with great service at some of the best events and most gorgeous locations in Britain'. The rooms are safari tents with decks, double beds and all the extras you'd expect in a boutique hotel. It could be smack in the middle of the Glastonbury Festival or on the banks of the Thames for the Henley Royal Regatta. And then it's gone, leaving you with memories of a unique holiday. Rooms from R6 000 to R22 000, depending upon the location; www.thepopuphotel.com.

The poetically named **A Room for London** is a riverboat perched on the roof of the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London to celebrate the Olympic year of 2012. It offers an en-suite double bedroom, small kitchen, library and a deck with views from Big Ben to St Paul's Cathedral. Rooms are booked up for 2012 but keep an eye out for updates on www.aroomforlondon.co.uk.

For a truly Spartan experience, there's the **Capsule Hotel** in the Netherlands. It consists of survival pods built for oil rigs in the 1970s. They have a diameter of 4,25 metres, tiny portholes and haven't been upgraded much, except for a chemical toilet next to the triangular hammock, which sleeps three. You could indulge in the deluxe option, which includes a DVD player and, as an optional extra, a bicycle for personal use. The pods are moved around Holland and could be on land or moored in a city canal. Capsules from R1 025 per night; www.unusualhotelsoftheworld.com.

– *Delené van der Lugt*



PARIS HOTELS FOR UNDER R1 500

MARAIS: HOTEL JEANNE D'ARC

If you adore the historic Marais, the Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc couldn't be in a better location. Just around the corner from the Place des Vosges yet on a quiet side street, this cosy, 35-room hotel makes guests feel at home. Tour brochures and daily papers fill the reception area, while dark wood tables – where you can have breakfast for R85 – fill the small dining room. Doubles from R830; www.hoteljeannedarc.com.

SAINT GERMAIN: HOTEL DE NESLE

Every one of the 20 guest rooms at the artsy Hotel de Nesle has its own theme, from the Coloniale, outfitted in the safari spirit with leopard-print pillows, to the Molière, a larger room that features painted murals of the French playwright. The hotel is unified by a bohemian vibe – dried flower bouquets hang from the reception room's rafters – and has been attracting travellers for 40 years. Doubles from R767; www.hoteldenesleparis.com.

LATIN QUARTER: THE FIVE HOTEL

It's a trek to the city centre from the Five Hotel, located on a street in the 5th arrondissement, but you'll walk past landmarks such as the Panthéon and Notre Dame. This friendly hotel features slick design with Chinese lacquered sculptures and 'raining' fibre-optic lights. Only the most basic of the 24 rooms meet the budget criteria, but even in those you'll find rose petals strewn across your bed. Doubles from R1 500; www.thefivehotel.com. – *Amy M Thomas*

JUST PITCH UP

LEFT Pop-up accommodation at Glastonbury Festival sports a neocolonial air ABOVE Green gardens at the Hotel de Nesle



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World Leisure Holidays

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MAURITIUS paul & virginie

Room Type	Pay 5 Stay 7
Comfort	from R7 790

Valid 01 June - 30 August 2012

Package includes:

Return flights from Johannesburg. Return coach transfers. Breakfast and Dinner daily. Early bird offer is included in the rates quoted. Book and pay 30 days prior to arrival to qualify.

Package excludes:

Airport taxes of approximately R3000 per adult.

DISCOVERYCARD HOLDERS: Get up to 22% cash back!

THAILAND the old phuket resort

Room Type	7 Nights
Deluxe	from R8 090

Valid 01 June - 30 August 2012

Package includes:

Return flights from Johannesburg. Return coach transfers. Breakfast only.

Package excludes:

Airport taxes of approximately R3460 per adult.



ZANZIBAR mapenzi beach club

Room Type	7 Nights
Superior Garden View	from R10 990

Valid 01 - 23 July 2012

Package includes:

Return flights from Johannesburg. Return coach transfers.

Package excludes:

Airport taxes of approximately R1150 per adult. Entry Visa of approximately USD 50 per adult to be paid on arrival in Zanzibar.

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OFF THE WALL
The Magazine Room, designed by Ina Matt Studio, is wallpapered with magazine page proofs, an extension of the 'rooms as models' theme

newer AMSTERDAM

WORDS NATALIE DIXON

In between a shwarma take-away and French-fry outlet on Amsterdam's main pedestrian artery is the unassuming entrance to the city's first 'fashion hotel'. Purposely built in an unfashionable part of the city, Hotel The Exchange is part of an Amsterdam urban-rejuvenation project. The Exchange is also an intersection of hotel, architecture and fashion experiences

GOING DUTCH

THIS PAGE Sample mouthwatering local fare at the on-site Stock restaurant
OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT In Room 522 by Iris Kloppenburg, electrical cord twirls through the room like artificial ivy; Roos Soetekouw's Eighties Room is dressed to impress in graphic retro style; The Exchange Hotel is located on Damrak, a lively street in the centre of Amsterdam



The creators of the hotel, Otto Nan and Suzanne Oxenaar, collaborated with students from the Amsterdam Fashion Institute and local architects. Void of any of the prescriptive hotel conventions, The Exchange's concept is centred on 'rooms dressed as models'. And no two rooms are the same. Every element of the hotel is a fashion metaphor: the pavement outside becomes a catwalk; lights and tables are no longer furnishing elements but 'accessories'; creases and pleats aren't fabric features but structural form; paint colour hints at human flesh not matching palettes. More literally, rooms 'dressed as models' take the shape of Rembrandt-style collars or Marie Antoinette's panniers. Other rooms draw inspiration from denim jackets, wallflowers and Frida Khalo's wardrobe.

Choose from one- to five-star rooms, but anyone seeking the typical five-star cues will have to shift their expectations to accommodate artists at play. At The Exchange, Otto and Suzanne subvert the traditional guest experience in a way that hints at their authenticity and unconventional spirit, just as they do in their other projects, the LLove Hotel in Tokyo and Lloyd Hotel in Amsterdam. Look out any of The Exchange's east-facing windows and you'll see a typical ramshackle Amsterdam 'back yard'.

The hotel's restaurant, Stock, acknowledges the vibrant nightlife of Amsterdam with an indulgent all-day breakfast as well as a hit-and-run menu of soups and sandwiches plus locally crafted marmalade, beer, ice cream and bread. The Exchange also houses a contemporary department store, Options!, with products by Dutch and international designers and local student talent. In its short lifetime, it has become the go-to place in the city for design items ranging from Dutch ceramics to Peruvian Alpaca wool garments, hand-printed notebooks from Berlin and unique products developed just for the store.

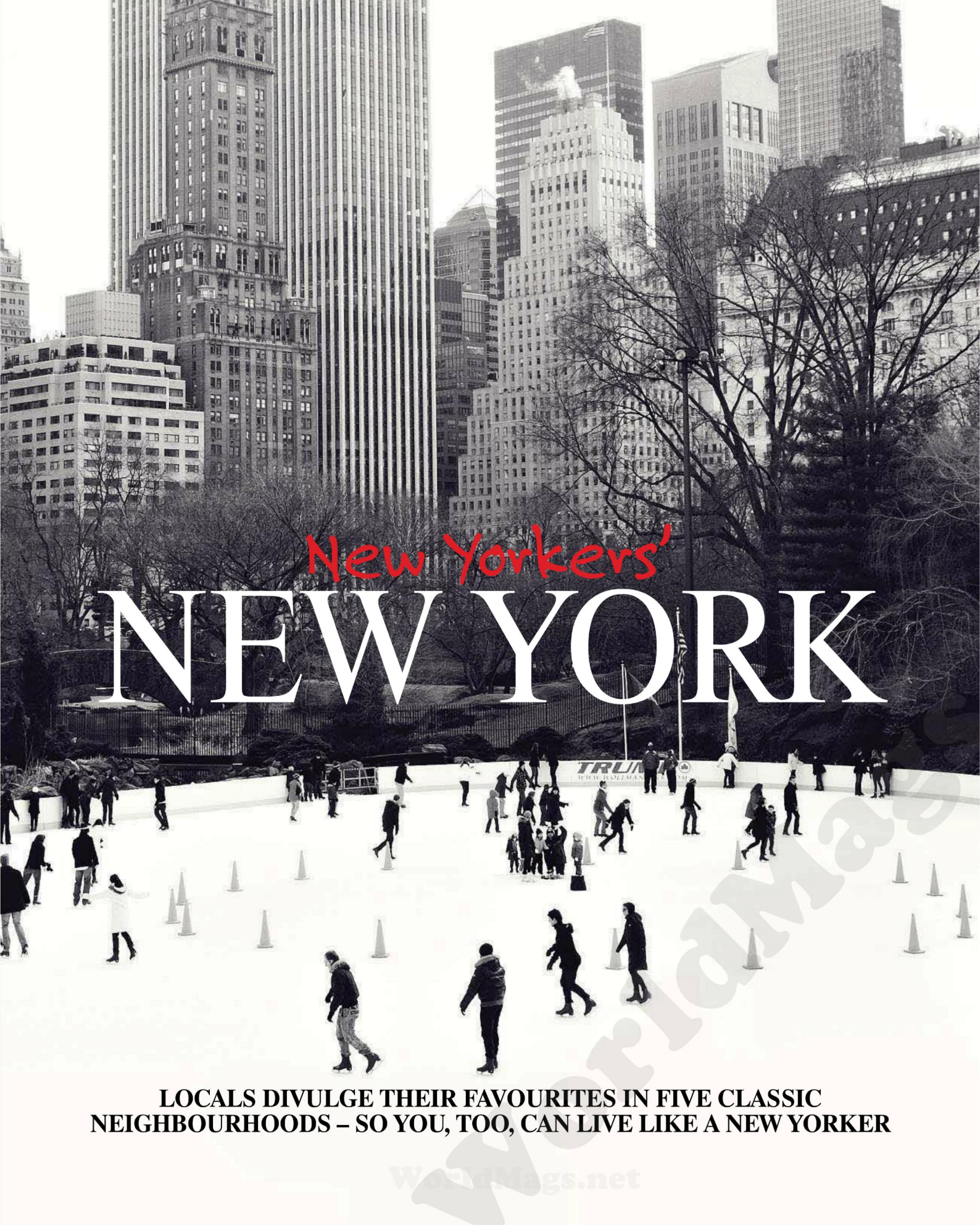
Hotel The Exchange From R1 022 for a one-star room to R2 555 for a five-star room;
www.exchangeamsterdam.com



EMPIRE STATE OF MIND

THIS PAGE Take in a sweeping view of Manhattan
and the East River from the Empire State
Building's observation deck
OPPOSITE Ice skaters in Central Park South





New Yorkers' NEW YORK

**LOCALS DIVULGE THEIR FAVOURITES IN FIVE CLASSIC
NEIGHBOURHOODS – SO YOU, TOO, CAN LIVE LIKE A NEW YORKER**

Though I'm not usually very chatty on planes, I do love it when, flying home to New York City, I end up sitting next to first-time visitors. They almost always have a slightly wild look in their eyes; it's a sign that they're worried they won't be able to see everything. Their questions spill out and I'm happy to answer them: where should I go for dim sum? How do you get to Brooklyn? Have you ever been to the Apollo? What they really want to know: is three days or five days or even a week enough time?

No. No, it's not. Sorry. I've clocked up 40 years living in or near the city and, though my love/hate for the place grows stronger each year, I would be a fool to say I know it, that I've seen all of it. I know my version of the city. I have my New York. It overlaps the New Yorks of others, but my personal map and experience of the city has been of my own making. You will have yours, too.

Lose the list of must-see attractions. Decide that this will be one trip of many. And do as we do: get to know the city's neighbourhoods. In town for a week? Choose three neighbourhoods. Maybe four. Spend a day or two in each. Walk up the avenues. Wander the side streets. Select a random pizza place/food cart/coffee house and pronounce it NYC's best. But say it out of earshot of any locals. We're nicer than you've heard, but three times as opinionated.

Give your neighbourhoods of choice a chance. Reject or love them for totally irrational reasons. New Yorkers do it all the time.

By day two or three you'll see that each neighbourhood is its own New York.

The city is no perfect jigsaw puzzle.

Smash some pieces together and create your own map.

— Jenna Schner

UPPER EAST SIDE

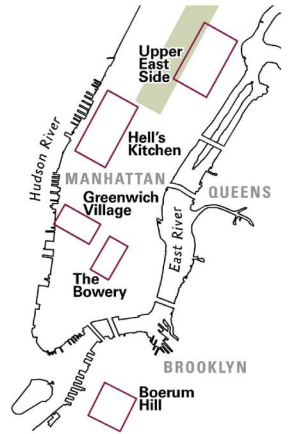
CENTRAL PARK AND THE EAST RIVER BRACKET THIS WELL-HEELED NEIGHBOURHOOD'S UNDERSUNG CHARMS

The Upper East Side may be the oddest of underdogs. Its blocks – stretching from 59th Street to 96th, from the East River to Central Park – house the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1), the Guggenheim (2), the Whitney (3) and the Frick (4). Prominent names live on Park Avenue. Pricey shops – Calvin Klein, Prada, Giorgio Armani – line Madison Avenue. But the Upper East Side gets very little respect from other New Yorkers. 'For years it was kind of synonymous with ladies who lunch, and people don't want to be associated with that,' says Susan Cheever, a lifelong UES resident and author of *Louisa May Alcott: A Personal Biography*. Upper East Siders don't rush to correct the record. They're happy keeping the neighbourhood's riches for themselves – and we're not talking money here. 'It's a small village. It's sophisticated but not uptight,' says Eric Ripert, chef-owner of Michelin-starred Le Bernardin, who moved to the UES from the Upper West Side in 1996.

People don't just live in apartments on the Upper East Side. They live on the Upper East Side. They don't live near the museums. They use the museums as extensions of their living rooms. And then there's Central Park – claimed by all New Yorkers but a true backyard for those who live uptown. Ripert spends at least part of every day he's in town on its paths. 'I know the saxophone player and the Rollerbladers. I know everyone over there.'

Feel free to pick your own favourite park bench. Afterward head across Fifth Avenue on 86th Street to the Neue Galerie's Café Sabarsky (5), which serves Viennese coffee on silver trays. The café's soft pretzels (paired with Bavarian sausage) put street-vendor versions to shame. Or stroll over to the corner of 81st and Third to share meze at *Beyoglu* (6), the best Turkish restaurant in the city. If you get in line at *Two Little Red Hens Bakery* (7) on Second Avenue, pray that the people ahead of you are placing big orders. You'll need time to decide between the Brooklyn Blackout cupcake and all those cookies.

Pay homage at the Met but escape to one of its tucked-away spots. Ask a guard in the Asian galleries to point you toward the moon gate of the Astor Court, recommends Cheever. Walk through it into a Ming dynasty scholar's garden. Don't ignore the neighbourhood's smaller cultural gems like the Cooper-Hewitt (8) for modern design (currently closed



AROUND THE CORNER
There's no shame in taking a break to see a movie at the Ziegfeld Theatre in Midtown (141 W 54th Street). One of the last single-screen houses in New York City, the 1 169-seat theatre turns movies into events. Crystal chandeliers light the grand (though suitably shabby) interior, awash in gold and red velvet. But this is no art-house theatre. Blockbusters rule the screen. If you're lucky, you'll be in town for the opening night of a musical flick. The place often inspires audiences to burst into applause as credits roll. — JS





LOCAL HEROES
CLOCKWISE Shop in the Design Store at the New Museum in The Bowery; Carl Shurz Park is a leafy haven; JMW Turner's 'The Harbour of Dieppe' on display at the intimate Frick Collection; Upper East Siders head to Two Little Red Hens for delicious baked goods





for renovation) or the **Jewish Museum** (9), housed in a mansion built in 1908. Visit the independent bookstores that still dot the Upper East Side, including **Crawford Doyle** (10), the **Corner Bookstore** (11) and **Kitchen Arts & Letters** (12).

On a bright spring day, it's challenging to secure space around one of the best free with-or-without-kids entertainments New York City has to offer: the small-dog run at **Carl Schurz Park** (13). A standout little sibling to Central Park and named for the first German-American senator, Carl Schurz starts at the butter yellow Gracie Mansion and curves down along the East River. 'The Esplanade on the East River is one of the most beautiful places on Earth, especially at night,' says Cheever. 'The river is just alive with activity.'

You don't mind if we keep it our little secret, do you? – *Jenna Schnuer*

HELL'S KITCHEN

OLD-SCHOOL ATTRACTIONS MIX WITH HOT NEWCOMERS WHERE GANGS ONCE ROAMED

If the name Hell's Kitchen sounds uninviting, be glad that at least 'Battle Row', 'House of Blazes' and 'Death Avenue' didn't stick. The monikers evoke a time in the early 1900s when the Parlor Mob, the Gorillas and the Gophers gangs stalked the streets and nearby docks. But while the neighbourhood between 34th and 57th Streets, bordered by Eighth Avenue on the east and the Hudson River on the west, has a dangerous past, today you're more likely to knock elbows with a Broadway star than a rabble-rouser.

Hell's Kitchen runs right up to the Theatre District, which makes for a nice commute for Chad Kimball, the Tony-nominated star. He has lived in Hell's Kitchen for over a year. 'I knew the closer I was to the theatre, the more the odds of being late to work would decrease,' he says. 'I've been half right.'

When he's not on stage, Kimball likes to unwind at neighbourhood spots like the whiskey bar **On the Rocks** (1) and art-filled restaurant **Druids** (2). The latter used to be called the Sunbrite Bar, where the Westies, a predominantly Irish group of thugs, hung out in the 1970s and '80s. Now you can graze on Long Island duck and peruse the local artwork for sale without fear of Eddie 'The Butcher' Cumiskey showing up.

Rudy's Bar & Grill (3) serves up free hot dogs when you stop by for a drink. Just look for the giant pig outside, then head in and take a seat at a booth covered in red duct tape. Or enjoy the tropical vibe and fruit-infused rum at the area's surf hang-out, **Réunion** (4).

The neighbourhood's reputation for great food has outlasted even the gangsters. Stroll down **Restaurant Row** – 46th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues – and you'll come across **Barbetta** (5), an Italian restaurant that's been around since 1906. Don Draper romanced Bethany at Barbetta (much to Betty's dismay) in Season Four of *Mad Men*, an honour that's not lost on current owner (and daughter of the original owner), Laura Maioglio. 'Andy Warhol and Woody Allen filmed movies here,' she says. 'Scenes for *The Departed* were shot here. But nothing has had an impact like having our menu on *Mad Men*.'

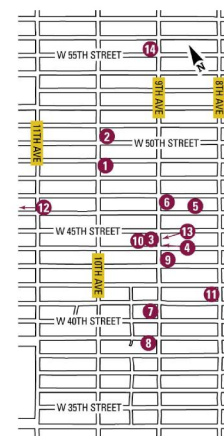
Save room for dessert because Hell's Kitchen bakes some devilish sweets. **Amy's Bread** (6) makes calories-be-damned almond brioche toast and coconut dream bars. If you swing by **Cupcake Café** (7), you may bump into radio host David Garland, recovering from the 'stimulus overload' of browsing the nearby **Hell's Kitchen Flea Market** (8). The weekends-only market offers everything from old chemistry beakers to a vintage *Dukes of Hazzard* wristwatch.

If you miss the flea market, the **Thrift & New Shoppe** (9) stocks an extensive collection of antique glassware arranged by colour. Catch the owner, Minas Dimitriou, when he's not too busy tinkering with jewellery and he might ask you to join him for a glass of wine. The goods at **Domus** (10) are brand-new but no less intriguing. The owners travel the world to find handcrafted gifts, like pillows from Peru and soaps from Afghanistan.

Besides neighbourhood shops, Hell's Kitchen has industrial areas and behemoth structures like the **Port Authority Bus Terminal** (11) – the largest bus station in the country – and the **Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum** (12), which floats on a 27 000-ton WWII aircraft carrier docked on the Hudson River.

And yet the neighbourhood surprises with unassuming architectural masterpieces. Tucked between an Italian restaurant and a crêpe shop, the **Film Centre Building** entrance (13) is easy to miss. But step inside and you'll see why the lobby, created by Ely Jacques Kahn in 1928, is often regarded as one of the finest examples of Art Deco in the city.

Another unlikely building stands on West 55th and 9th. Opened in 2005, the **Joan Weill Centre** (14) is the largest dance complex in the country and home to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. Check out an open dance class; while there, you might share an elevator with Ailey dancer Hope Boykin. She says Hell's Kitchen is a tight-knit community where employees at her local nail salon greet her by name. 'They know when I'm on tour,' she says, 'and welcome me back with a hug.' – *Amelia Mularz*



AROUND THE CORNER Le Parker Meridien hotel (119 W 56th Street) is too far east to be within Hell's Kitchen, but the lobby's hidden Burger Joint has all the allure of underground hangouts from the neighbourhood's colourful history. Peel back a curtain near the front desk to reveal a backroom grill and indulge in one of the juiciest burgers in town. Or satisfy your craving out in the open at Knave, the lobby's Gothic café and bar, where you can get an artful latte. The cocktails won't disappoint, either, and the addictive deep-fried olives are free. – *AM*

CITY SIGHTS

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT New York is a city of billboards; in Hell's Kitchen, classic Italian restaurant Barbetta attracts theatre-goers with discounts for same-day ticket holders; Village people head to Sabon for indulgent bath products; and to Jeffrey's Grocer for \$1 cups of Stumptown Coffee



TIME OUT

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Get the real NY market experience at Brooklyn Flea; Mark Isreal's Doughnut Plant is legendary; narrow lanes in Greenwich Village call for two-wheelers; on Saturday mornings, gormands head to Smorgasburg open-air market outside Brooklyn Flea





AROUND THE CORNER The High Line, the second elevated park in the world (after Paris's Promenade Plantée), earned raves from the day it opened in June 2009. Stretching from the Meatpacking District to W 20th Street (and eventually to W 34th Street), this erstwhile elevated cargo railway was saved from demolition by neighbourhood activists. It now makes for one of the most pleasant strolls in the city, with gardens, benches, artwork and views of the Hudson River. Enter the park at Gansevoort and Washington streets. – DF

GREENWICH VILLAGE

WINDING STREETS LINED WITH STYLE-SETTING SHOPS – AND ONE TELEGENIC BAKERY – MAKE FOR IDEAL AIMLESS STROLLS

Greenwich Village is the Big Apple equivalent of the Latin Quarter in Paris or Trastevere in Rome – one of those neighbourhoods that inspire ambling and swoons and silent wishes that you could, even just for a short time, call it home. The Village, to use the local parlance, stretches south to north from Houston to 14th streets, and east to west from Broadway to the Hudson River. Already an established village, it managed to escape being harnessed by the 19th-century grid plan for Manhattan's streets and remains a bewildering labyrinth of winding lanes and unlikely intersections – W 10th and W 4th Streets, anyone?

Artists such as Allen Ginsburg, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell and Jimi Hendrix (whose Electric Lady Studios still buzzes at 52 W 8th Street) once got their start in the Village. Cheaper rents and bohemian life have since decamped to other parts – unless you know where to look. Beyond the map-wielding tourists, the long queues at **Magnolia Bakery** (1), which had cameos in the TV show *Sex and the City*, and the style-setters who patrol the high-end clothes shops that now flank Bleeker Street (one of the most popular thoroughfares in the Village), a real neighbourhood still thrives.

It's all right to put the map away and just wander. You may stumble upon a Picasso sculpture in the

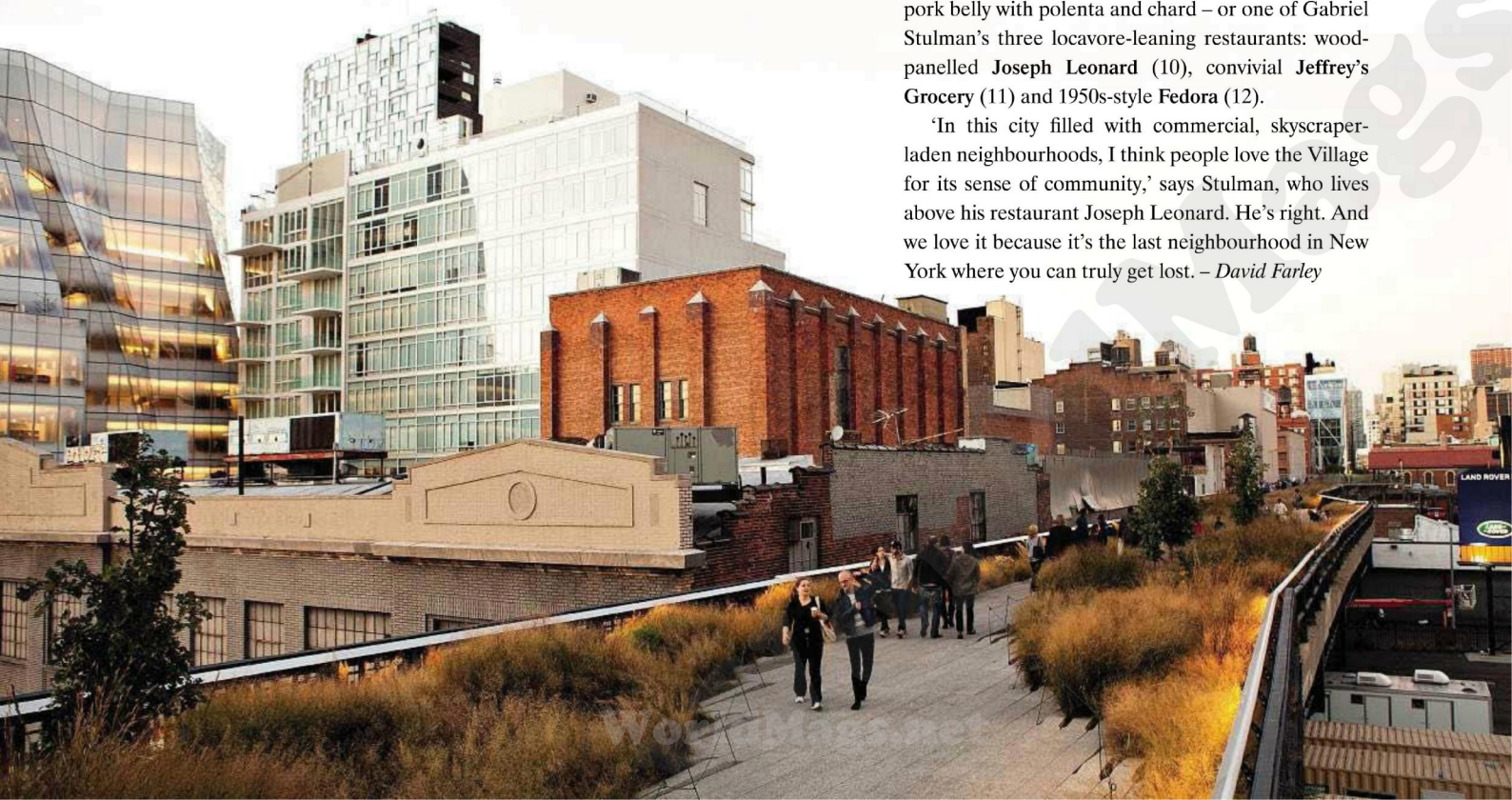
shadow of the IM Pei-designed apartment towers near Washington Square Park. Or be surprised by the discovery of artist/filmmaker Julian Schnabel's gargantuan pink Italian palazzo around the corner from **Richard Meier's three modern glass-and-steel towers** (2), adding to the Village's incongruent skyline.

Architect Richard Meier, who used to live on Perry Street, says he's seen the neighbourhood change dramatically in the last few decades. 'The brownstones were a mess and the area was dangerous. But now everything has been renovated in a wonderful way,' he says. 'You go in the middle of the week and see people biking and hanging out in cafés.'

Every few blocks a coffee house, the interior usually clad in warm wood, seems to pop up. Writers and artists hang out at **Jack's Stir Brew** (3), where the tables are shared and conversation flows. Just down the street at **Bonnie Slotnick's** (4) rare and out-of-print cookbooks' shop, top chefs scan the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in the hope of finding an old recipe to reinvent.

The Village boasts four Michelin-starred restaurants – **Soto** (5), **Annisa** (6), **Blue Hill** (7) and **Wallsé** (8). But to really eat like a local, step into English gastropub **The Spotted Pig** (9) – for a pint of Old Speckled Hen and pig-centric plates such as crispy pork belly with polenta and chard – or one of Gabriel Stulman's three locavore-leaning restaurants: wood-panelled **Joseph Leonard** (10), convivial **Jeffrey's Grocery** (11) and 1950s-style **Fedora** (12).

'In this city filled with commercial, skyscraper-laden neighbourhoods, I think people love the Village for its sense of community,' says Stulman, who lives above his restaurant Joseph Leonard. He's right. And we love it because it's the last neighbourhood in New York where you can truly get lost. – David Farley



THE BOWERY

THIS FORMER SKID ROW NOW BLOOMS WITH CUTTING-EDGE ART AND ARCHITECTURE

New Yorkers don't come to the Bowery to find classical beauty. Lined by a mishmash of buildings – representing nearly every major architectural style since the late 18th century, locals claim – the Bowery is a neighbourhood-like street of uneven sidewalks and few trees. From Cooper Square to Chatham Square, it runs like a scar down southeast Manhattan, splitting the neighbourhoods of Greenwich Village, the East Village, SoHo, the Lower East Side and Chinatown. What the area lacks in aesthetics it makes up for in gritty energy, a fascinating history and, most recently, a dizzying rate of change. Just six years ago, the Bowery was New York's Skid Row, made up of flophouses and bars. But recently the druggies and delinquents have moved on and only one flophouse still operates. The Bowery has quickly become one of Manhattan's most dynamic parts, with hip high-rise hotels flipping on the lights and noteworthy restaurants firing up their burners. In many ways, though, the new-look Bowery is simply reverting to its pre-Skid Row days.

For most of the 19th century, the Bowery served as the city's entertainment centre. New Yorkers came here to eat, drink and see theatre. But in 1878 a new elevated railway above the Bowery suddenly cast the area in daytime shadows, inspiring illicit behaviour and a migration elsewhere for most of the Bowery's legitimate businesses.

In the last half of the 20th century, artists – Mark Rothko, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Maya Lin, Keith Haring

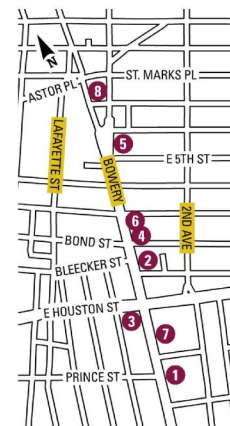
– began moving into the area, taking advantage of the spacious living quarters and cheap rents. Bands that got their start at the legendary (and recently defunct) club CBGB – The Ramones, Blondie, Patti Smith – all came to roost on the Bowery at one time or another.

No surprise, then, that in 2007 the trailblazing **New Museum** (1), which showcases the work of underrepresented contemporary artists, opened its doors on the Bowery with a striking new building that resembles a stack of seven off-kilter boxes. 'We wanted to help pioneer the rebirth of the Bowery,' says Lisa Phillips, the New Museum's director.

And that they did. Well-turned-out crowds flock to restaurants like Michelin-starred chef Daniel Boulud's meat-and-beer mecca, **DBGB** (2); **Pulino's** (3), owned by arbiter of New York dining cool Keith McNally; and southern-accented **Peels** (4).

The brash **Cooper Square Hotel** (5), which looks like an escapee from the Dubai skyline, now competes for guests with the posh **Bowery Hotel** (6). Three Pritzker Prize-winning architects have new buildings on the Bowery: Sir Norman Foster's sleek **Sperone Westwater art gallery** (7), Thom Mayne's seemingly armour-clad **Cooper Union building** (8) and Tokyo-based **SANAA's New Museum**. And the Bowery's last flophouse? An upscale hotel company recently bought the building. That means in a year or two, you can expect to see a new 'it' place to lay your head.

– David Farley



AROUND THE CORNER
Ask any doughnut expert his or her opinion on the best doughnuts in the country and you'll likely get pointed to the Lower East Side. There, Mark Isreal runs the **Doughnut Plant** (379 Grand Street), which serves doughnuts made from all natural ingredients, including fruit from farmers markets and nuts roasted on-site. Signature flavours include crème brûlée and *tres leches*, but fans line up for seasonal flavours like marzipan and rose petal. – DF



AROUND THE CORNER
Wander 15 minutes south on Court Street to Carroll Gardens, an Italian neighbourhood having its own food renaissance, largely due to Frank Falcinelli and Frank Castronovo, owners of **Frankies Spuntino** (457 Court Street) and its adjacent sister restaurant **Prime Meats** (465 Court Street), which plates up high-quality, affordable home-grown German food. – AHG

BOERUM HILL

TREES – AND FINE DINING – GROW IN THIS LOW-KEY BROOKLYN NEIGHBOURHOOD, A FAVOURITE OF NEW YORK'S CREATIVE CLASS

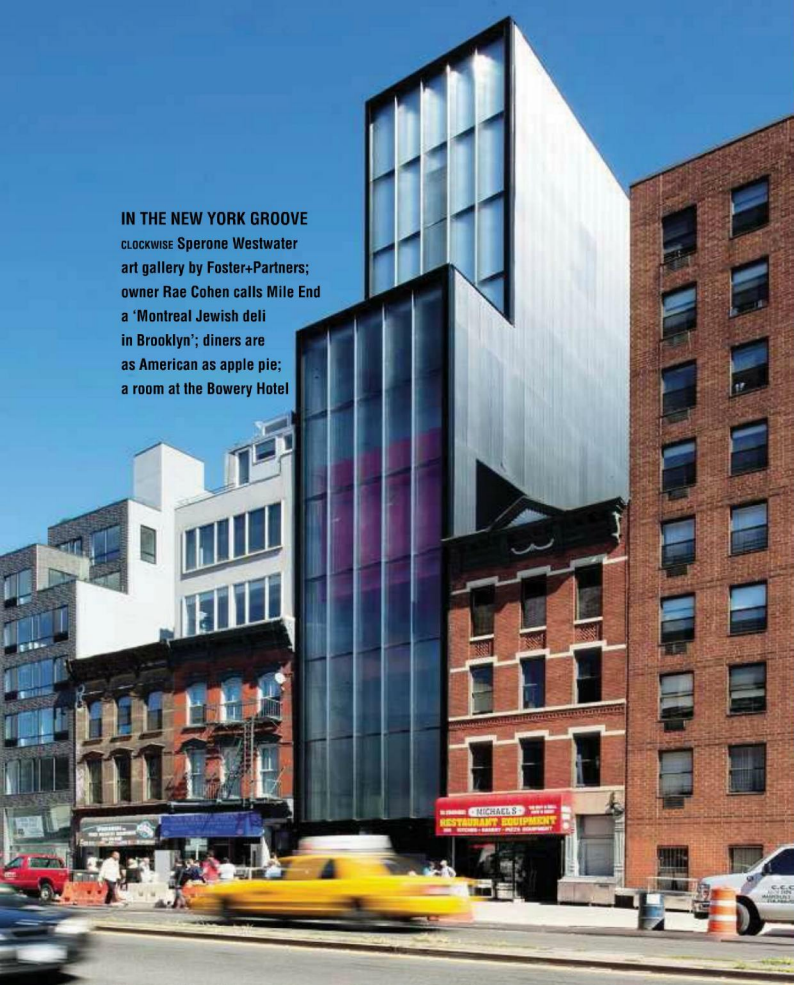
Brooklyn is big. If it were a separate city, it would rank as America's fourth largest, more populated than Boston, Seattle and San Francisco combined. Recommending one neighbourhood inside its amorphous boundaries is no easy task. But exit the F train at Bergen and, before the subway rumble fades, you'll smell wood-burning fireplaces, hear the piping call of a blue jay and witness block after block of blossoming cherry and dogwood trees, crooked sidewalks and stunted Italianate row houses. Despite what some people may think, the borough isn't limited to roller coasters and tattooed Williamsburg hipsters. Brooklyn has a soft side, too.

For urban-weary Manhattanites, Boerum Hill – originally named after Simon Boerum's 18th-century

family farm – has long served as an express getaway to 'the countryside'. Developed from 1840 to 1870, its low-key sensibility continues today, ensuring its place as a sweet spot favoured by NYC's creative class, particularly editors and writers who can regularly be found nursing pints at **The Brooklyn Inn** (1), one of several speakeasies from the neighbourhood's Irish-dominated Prohibition period.

Boerum Hill's ancient fields now lie deep beneath its brownstones and acorn-strewn streets. The area has since become particularly known for its food. The neighbourhood's main corridor, Smith Street, bucked Manhattan's celebrity-chef trend and took advantage of its farm heritage by spearheading the city's locavore

IN THE NEW YORK GROOVE
clockwise Sperone Westwater
art gallery by Foster+Partners;
owner Rae Cohen calls Mile End
a 'Montreal Jewish deli
in Brooklyn'; diners are
as American as apple pie;
a room at the Bowery Hotel



HIGH-LIFE HIGHLIGHT

Bowery bests include the view from the 21st floor penthouse terrace of the Cooper Square Hotel

movement five years ago. The Franco-forward eatery **Saul** (2) snagged a Michelin star in 2007 for homey dishes such as pan-roasted rabbit with sweetcorn and heirloom beets with Honeycrisp apples. Newcomer **Brooklyn Fare** (3) clinched the area's food status in 2010 when it received two Michelin stars. One stretch of Smith Street is home to five French restaurants, including **Robin des Bois** (4), with a popular Thursday night \$1-oyster special. In July, three blocks of Smith are closed to traffic for a Bastille Day fête.

Mile End (5) on Hoyt Street gave the city its first taste of Montreal-style smoked meat and chewy bagels, earning it a nod from *New York* magazine as Best Deli of 2010. Shoppers find R150 **Hecho en Brooklyn** T-shirts at Brooklyn Tattoo (6), attend readings by such local authors as Jonathan Franzen at **Book Court** (7), buy wine totes from **Annie's Blue Ribbon General Store** (8) and fill them with vino made at one of Brooklyn's wineries in Red Hook at **Brooklyn Wine Exchange** (9).

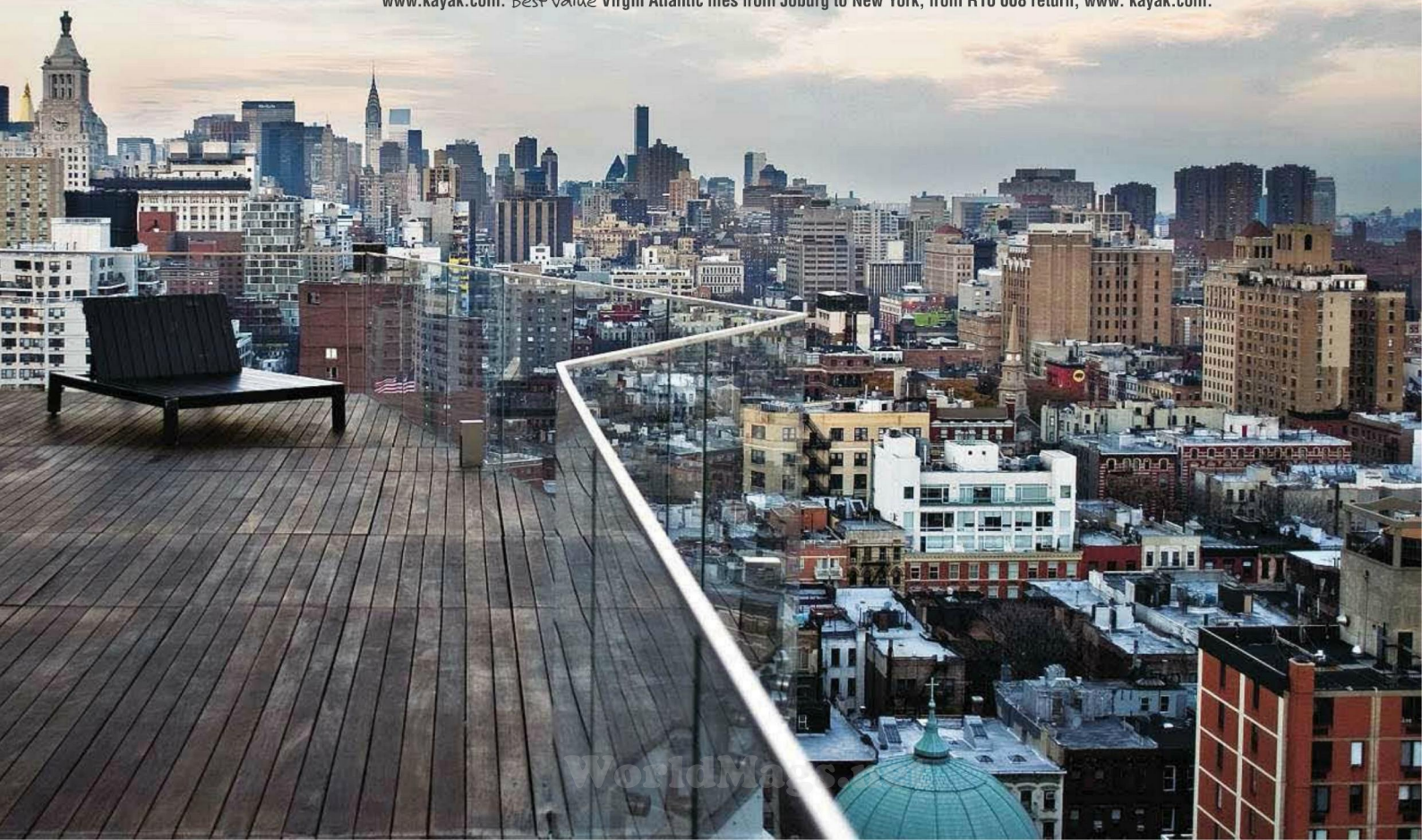
A few blocks south, where Boerum bleeds into Carroll Gardens, **Smith + Butler** (10) purveys upscale menswear and vintage motorcycle helmets and cheese shop **Stinky Bklyn** (11) fills an all-Brooklyn-made food basket with pickles, cookies and chocolates.

After eating and shopping, walk 15 minutes west to

check out the new Pier 6 extension of Brooklyn Bridge Park, stretching along the waterfront from the end of Atlantic Avenue. Yes, changes loom in Boerum. A recent rash of indie actors, including Michelle Williams and Emily Mortimer, have replaced old guard residents. And Atlantic Avenue is undergoing an upscale corporate makeover: interior designer **Jonathan Adler** (12) and designer discount retailer **Barney's Co-Op** (13) have both opened outposts here.

Boerum's Middle Eastern community, also concentrated along Atlantic Avenue, is the most threatened by this upgrade. Colourful fruit stands sit beside Yemeni travel agencies and Lebanese restaurants that serve fattoush and baked kibbe. No grocer is more beloved than Brooklyn-born Charlie Sahadi, whose family has run **Sahadi's** (14) since 1895. Known for its candies, olives and fragrant roasted pistachios, Sahadi's also has the best spicy hummus in the city. Many a shopper can be seen buying a container en route to a sunset picnic along the water. Sahadi has faith in the area's evolution and even plans an expansion of his store. 'Walk down any street today,' he says, 'and you'll hear different languages and see different religions and people with different skin colours living together as brother and sister.' – *Adam H Graham*

GETTING THERE Prices of flights from Joburg to New York fluctuate frequently, so check both www.travelstart.co.za and www.kayak.com. Best value Virgin Atlantic flies from Joburg to New York, from R10 008 return, www.kayak.com.



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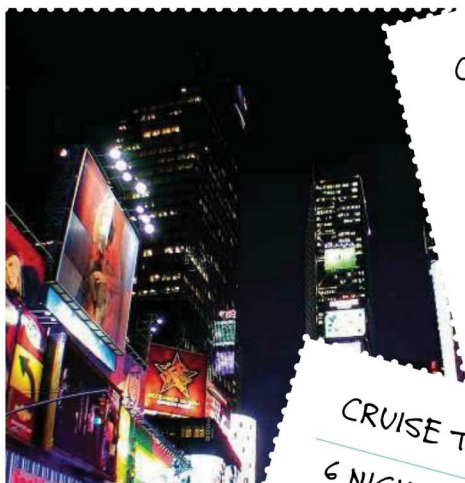
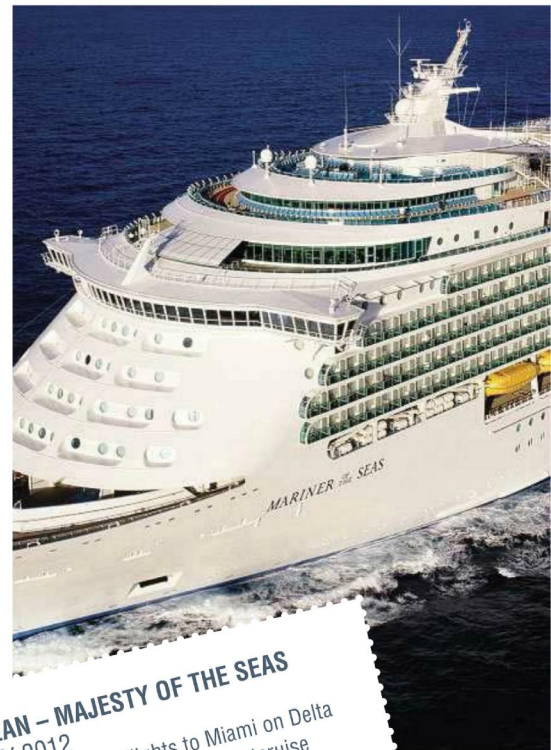
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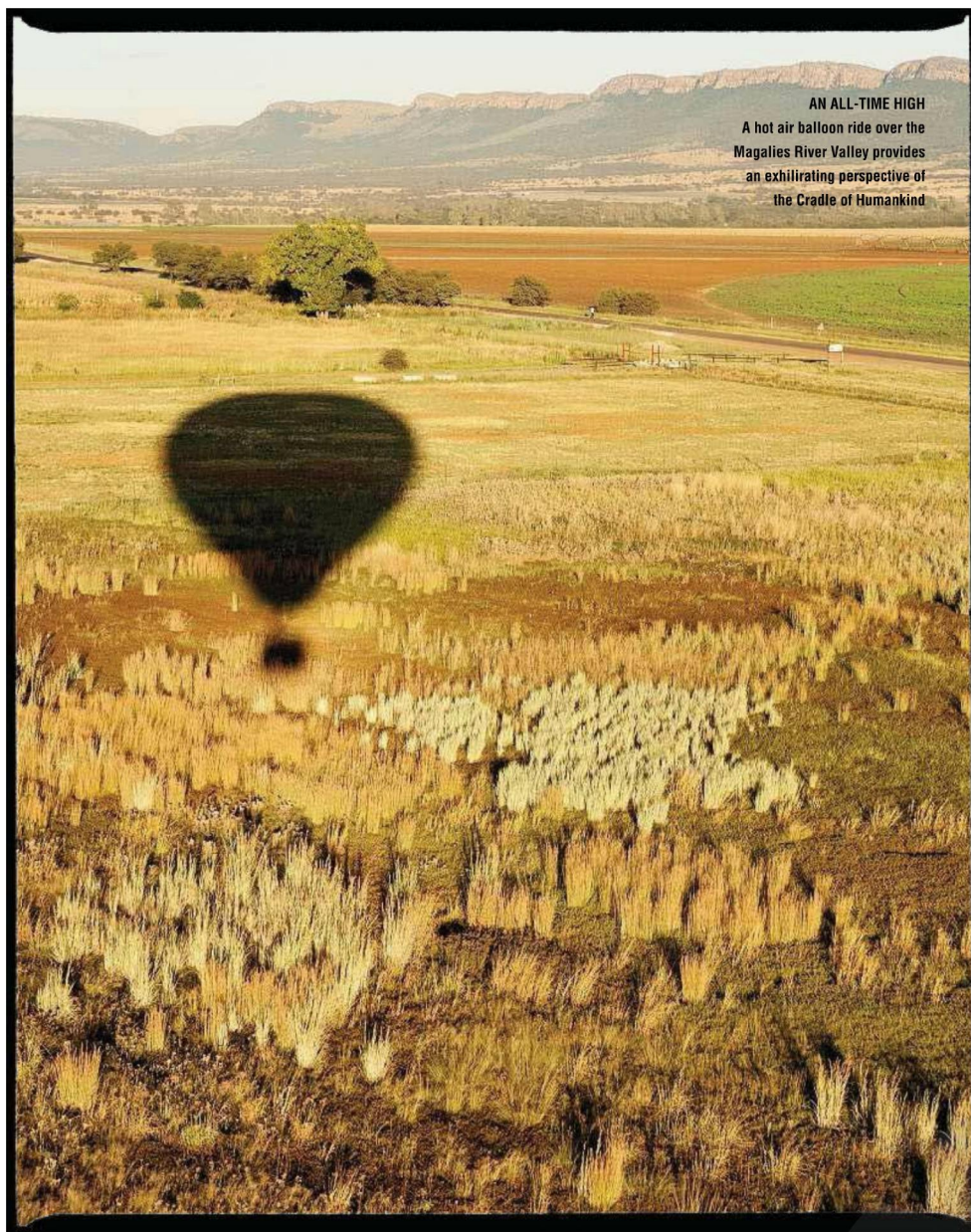
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HEADING BACK IN TIME

**IN SEARCH OF OUR MOST ANCIENT ANCESTORS?
EXPLORE THE CRADLE OF HUMANKIND IN GAUTENG**

WORDS BRIDGET MCNULTY PHOTOGRAPHS MARK PEDDLE

I MUST BE HONEST: my idea of a holiday usually involves palm trees, golden beaches, a bright blue ocean and nothing much to do. But after a break in the Cradle of Humankind, learning about evolution and using my brain in entirely new ways, I left feeling more invigorated and refreshed than if I'd spent the week in a bikini. It turns out knowledge is not only power, but energy. Who knew?



The Cradle Forest Camp

We began the week in a rustic, back-to-nature way: in thatched A-frame chalets on stilts set in the heart of an indigenous forest, next to a singing stream. The chalets are small, simple and comfortable – with everything you need to self-cater, but no more. A sweet little balcony looks out over the stream, and an outdoor fire is the perfect way to wile away an evening, braaiing the way we all did before we had fancy tools and gadgets. The air is filled with the croaking of frogs, the singing of cicadas and the burbling of the stream. Add the crackling of fire and it's the perfect natural melody. The Cradle is also home to an apparently highly rated restaurant, which we never got to try due to their erratic opening hours.

It does boast an incredible view out over the veld – look out for the resident giraffe – and the game reserve itself: 3 000 hectares of untouched wilderness, home to white rhino, leopard, giraffe, warthog, zebra, wildebeest and a dozen antelope, as well as some interesting small predators like aardwolf and civet. An afternoon game drive is filled with stories about the area from Peter Van der Bank, the resident game ranger, and the chance to catch the stunning views of the whole Cradle of Humankind.

The air smells like sun-warmed veld and the sky is a limitless blue – until you catch a glimpse of a plane taking off from Lanseria and realise you're less than half an hour away from the airport. It is, in short, the most convenient route to getting back to nature.

Bill Harrop's 'Original' Balloon Safaris

If it's views of the Cradle you're after, there is no more stylish – or exhilarating – way to do it than in the air, from a hot air balloon. Bill Harrop's is the oldest ballooning company in South Africa, in operation since 1981, and it has the dawn hot air balloon ride down to a fine art. It's a five-star-luxury experience, from the stunning location with tea and coffee before you fly to an hour in the sky in one of the beautiful balloons (complete with expert commentary on any questions you might have about the area), bubbly on landing and a fabulous champagne breakfast waiting for you. It's an extraordinary morning in the Magalies River Valley, looking over farmlands and towards Hartebeespoort dam: a 360° view of this magical part of South Africa and a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

If you're looking for something a little less five-star, the same company also offers two more budget-conscious options (that still adhere to the same professional service and safety precautions, but without the frills) in Cloud Nine and Action Balloon Flights. But if you're going for a once-in-a-lifetime flight, why not make it the best one around?

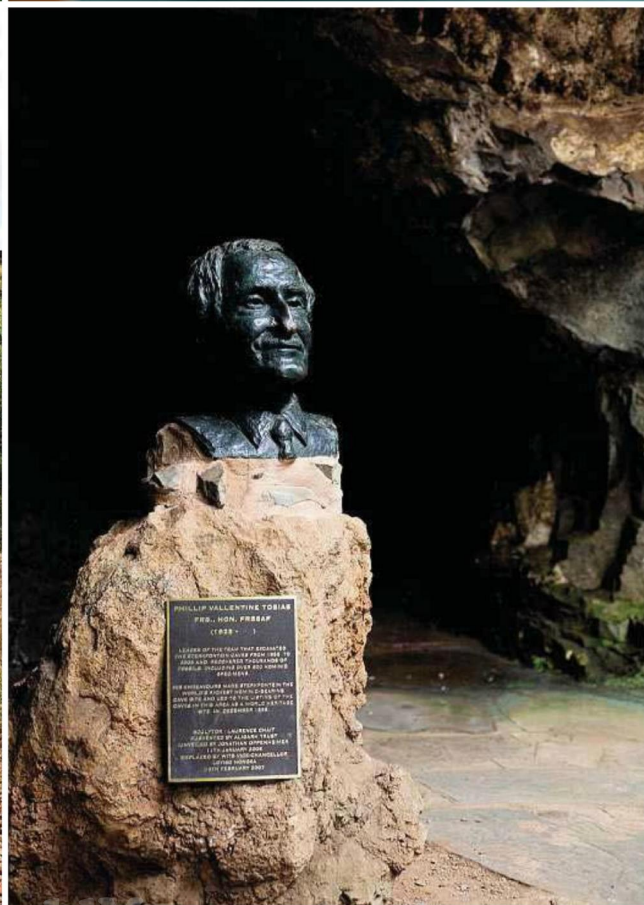
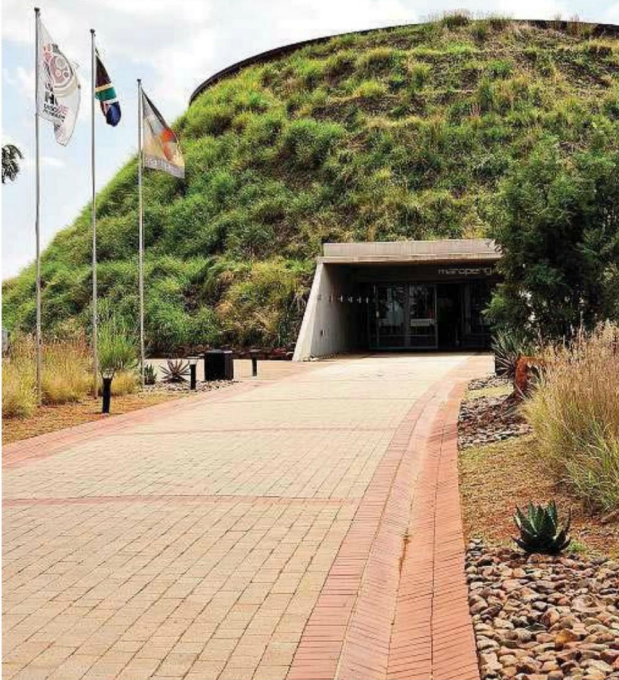
ONE WITH NATURE

Forum Homini Boutique Hotel blends seamlessly into the surrounding bush, making it a naturally luxurious experience





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The Honeymoon Suite at Forum Homini guarantees privacy and beauty in one; Palaeo Tours introduce you to your earliest ancestors; the Maropeng Hotel offers sweeping views from every angle; get back to nature at The Cradle Forest Camp; the Sterkfontein Caves are guarded by one of their earliest excavators; take a ride through history at the Maropeng Visitor Centre





Maropeng Hotel

The two most famous fossil sites in this area are Maropeng and Sterkfontein Caves: Maropeng has its own hotel attached, and we had visions of a tourist Lego box stuck onto the museum. Thankfully, we were mistaken. Maropeng Hotel is quite lovely, with picture-postcard views from every room – the blue Magaliesberg, the rolling hills of the Cradle and the deep-red earth that undercuts it all. The skies are vast, the clouds impressive and the air is sweet and clean. The hotel, perched on the edge of the Cradle, fits into the surrounding landscape beautifully, with four-star rooms offering every creature comfort and a restaurant serving delicious staples. Being able to stroll the grounds of Maropeng solo, once all the crowds have left, is a real treat – especially as the sun dips into the Cradle and the night sky lights up with stars.

Maropeng and the Sterkfontein Caves

So what about the main attractions? Again, we were pleasantly surprised. Both Maropeng and the Sterkfontein Caves offer an easily digestible slice of ancient history through exhibitions, video and live tours. Maropeng itself is fascinating – a little Disney, with a boat ride that takes you through the four elements (earth, air, wind and fire) – but who doesn't love a bit of Disney? There's also a great interactive exhibition that both kids and adults will enjoy. The Sterkfontein Caves offer a tour that takes you deep underground to the drippy, dark interiors where scientists are still excavating the remains of Little Foot, Sterkfontein's biggest find, from the cement-hard breccia rock. It's a fascinating 45 minutes, accompanied by an excellent little museum explaining all about man's evolution to the modern day.

Palaeo Tours

You absolutely have to do a tour with Palaeo Tours, the best possible way to get to grips with the Cradle of Humankind. Run by Marianne Robertson, these

half- or full-day tours take you to the private fossil site of Drimolen and put you face to face with a scientist *au fait* with this excavation and more than happy to answer all your questions about the Cradle, palaeontology, evolution or the fossils themselves. Drimolen is approximately 1.4 million years old and has been excavated since 1994. They've found some remarkable hominid fossils (predecessors of early man) and continue to uncover rare clues to our ancient history. The beauty of a Palaeo Tour is that the subject comes alive in the hands of your scientist, who is actively involved in research, passionate about the subject and able to weave stories from fossil, dust and rock.

Forum Homini

If you have your heart set on luxury, there's simply no other choice than Forum Homini. This quirky boutique hotel is extraordinary – on all levels. The roofs are planted with indigenous grasses so the rooms (or caves, as they call them) disappear into the surrounding landscape. There is South African artwork at every turn, but so beautifully incorporated into the space that it seems organic. Each room looks out onto its own private patio and garden, so you feel like you're the only people in the wide-open veld. And the food, served at Roots restaurant, will take your breath away – guaranteed. Sumptuous six-course dinners paired with the perfect wine, gourmet five-course breakfasts that you have to eat slowly so as to appreciate every mouthful, and small surprises at every turn. Couples looking for a special treat may want to order a heavenly bath experience, and larger groups can participate in interactive cooking or sound-therapy sessions. Or you can just lie back, in your decadent room or pool-sized bath and unwind... completely uninterrupted.

We came to the Cradle of Humankind to learn about our most ancient ancestors, but we found so much more: extraordinary natural beauty, exceptional cuisine, a fountain of information and, most importantly, a renewed sense of wonder in the world.

EAT

The Cradle Restaurant is open only for Thursday lunch; Friday lunch and dinner; Saturday breakfast, lunch and dinner; and Sunday breakfast and four-course set lunch (R225 per person). So do check if it's open before making the trip out. www.thecradle.co.za.

Maropeng has an on-site restaurant serving breakfast,

light lunch and dinner. www.maropeng.co.za.

Roots, Forum Homini's award-winning restaurant, is a must for decadent dinners and breakfasts, as well as Saturday brunch and Sunday lunch. www.forumhomini.com/roots.

SLEEP

The Cradle Forest Camp Doubles R250 per night during the week, R600 per night on

weekends for a self-catering chalet. www.thecradle.co.za.

Maropeng Hotel Doubles from R2 182 including breakfast. www.maropeng.co.za.

Forum Homini Doubles from R3 500 including breakfast and dinner. (No children under 12.) www.forumhomini.com.

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Bill Harrop's 'Original' Balloon Safaris From R2 310 to R2 770

for a one-hour flight, tea or coffee before departure, bubbly on landing and a champagne breakfast. www.balloon.co.za.

Maropeng and Sterkfontein Caves R200 for a combination ticket to tour both caves. www.maropeng.co.za.

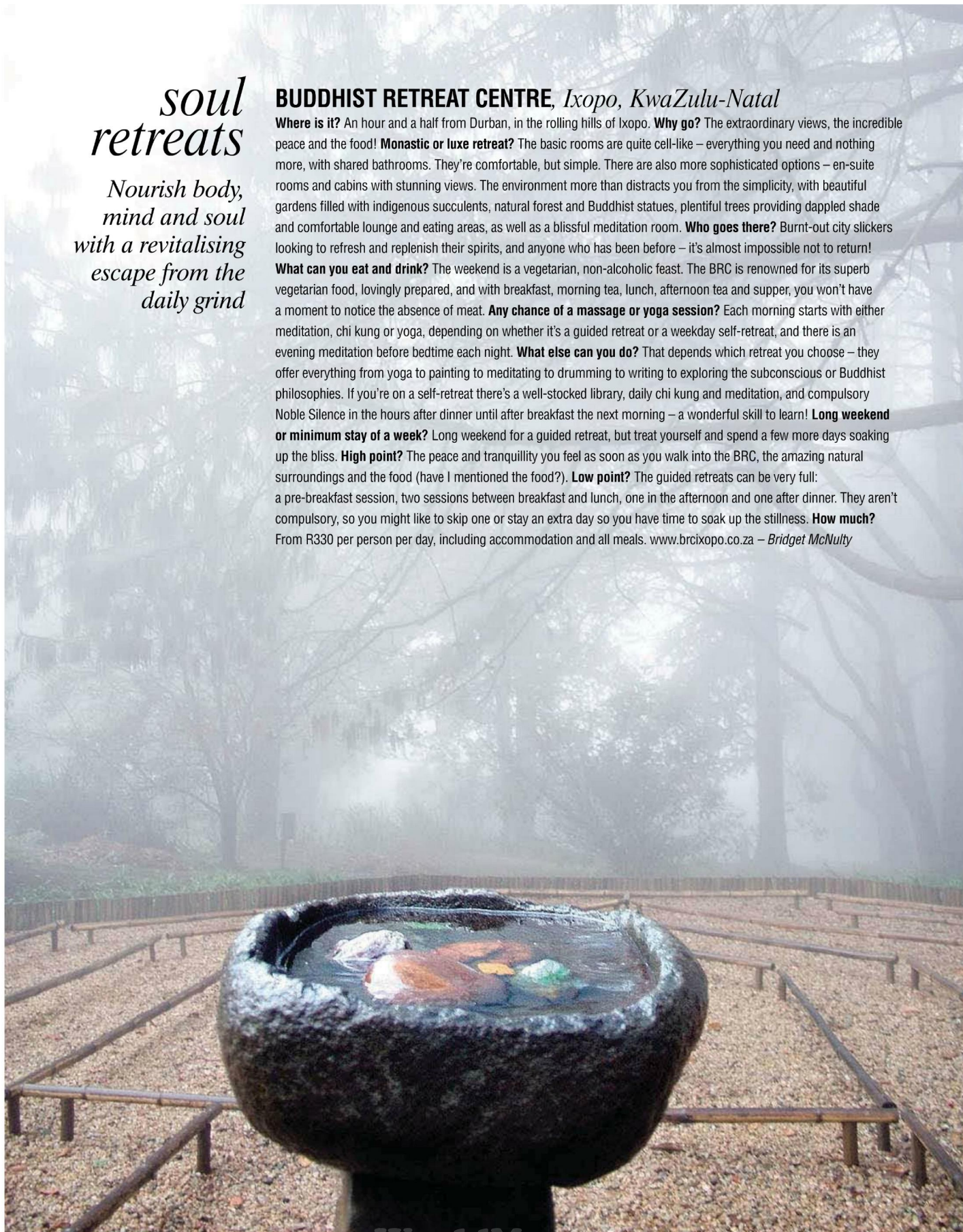
Palaeo Tours R3 500 for half-day tour for two, or R3 900 for full-day tour, including tea and snacks. www.palaeotours.com.

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BUDDHIST RETREAT CENTRE, Ixopo, KwaZulu-Natal

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PHOTOGRAPH ANGELA BUCKLAND

SATYAGRAHA HOUSE, *Joburg*

Where is it? Mahatma Gandhi's home from 1908 to 1909 is in the residential neighbourhood of Orchards. **Why go?** It's not your typical retreat but nonetheless a unique guest-house experience. Satyagraha manages to exist as a museum paying tribute to Gandhi's time in Johannesburg and as a spiritual living space. The curated decor flawlessly merges the museum and living spaces, creating a rich, evocative experience. **Monastic or luxe retreat?** Spiritual, with beautifully considered but understated rooms that are calm, simple and sophisticated. No electronic devices in the establishment. **Who goes there?** Business travellers, tourists, burnt-out city slickers or yoginis all find stillness here. **What can you eat and drink?** Delicious vegetarian meals are freshly prepared with care to nourish and restore. No alcohol is served. **Any chance of a massage or yoga session?** Yes, by advance request. **What else can you do?** Meditate in Gandhi's original meditation room, a place of stillness and peace. **Long weekend or minimum stay of a week?** A few days, no more. **High point?** Food, stillness, decor, history. **Low point?** Getting lost on my way there. The directions are sketchy, so a GPS is essential. **How much?** From R1 500 for a Comfort Room, suites from R3 460. A family cottage is available too. www.satyagrahahouse.com – *Luanne Toms*

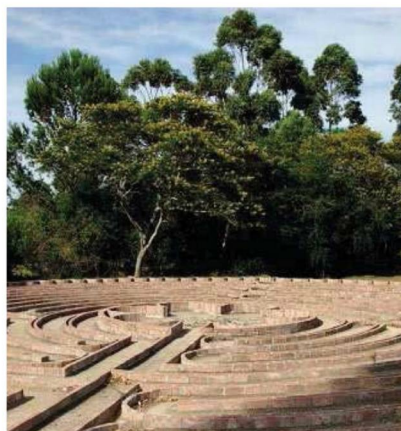


WATERFALL RETREAT CENTRE, *KZN*

Where is it? Half an hour from Durban, just outside Hillcrest. **Why go?** To feel transplanted into the beautiful middle of nowhere, although it's really just down the road. **Monastic or luxe retreat?** Monastic but comfortable, with a breathtaking yoga and meditation room that's all glass and steel. **Who goes there?** Yoga lovers who want a spiritual experience attached to their yoga practice. **What can you eat and drink?** Accommodation is self-catering, but day retreats include a delicious lunch and tea. Alcohol isn't in keeping with the spirit. **Any chance of a massage or yoga session?** Dawn yoga is a must if you stay over – watching the sunrise from the yoga room is unforgettable. There is mid-morning and afternoon yoga of various types, mostly kundalini. **What else can you do?** Meditate, follow the trail to a lovely waterfall or read in the well-stocked library. **Long weekend or minimum stay of a week?** Day retreats for those who live in Durban, long weekend for those who don't. **High point?** The architecture blends in so seamlessly that you feel suspended in the forest as you do yoga or meditate. **Low point?** They are still setting up the accommodation options, so it's all a little rustic at the moment. **How much?** From R300 per person per night or from R200 per person for day retreats. Yoga from R70. www.waterfallretreatcenter.com – *Bridget McNulty*

TEMENOS RETREAT, *McGregor*

Where is it? In McGregor, under two hours' drive from Cape Town. **Why go?** To recharge and soak up the serene, spiritual atmosphere. **Monastic or luxe retreat?** Each comfortable cottage has its own kitchenette, a braai area, private stoep and a fireplace for winter. In summer, the lap pool and beautiful, peaceful gardens provide a cool reprieve. **Who goes there?** Anyone looking to reflect and relax in solitude in a respectful, tranquil space (great for women travelling alone). To paint, read or write, or to join the guided wellness weeks and silent retreats. **What can you eat and drink?** The cottages are self-catering but the restaurant, Tebaldi, serves delicious country-style breakfasts and lunches, or weekend dinners, with a range of local wines. **Any chance of a massage or yoga session?** Yoga and a range of healing therapies are available on request. I loved my private yoga class, but was too busy resting to request other therapies. **What else can you do?** Enjoy meditation sessions, guided silent retreats, wellness weeks and courses. **Long weekend or minimum stay of a week?** Treat yourself to a week so you can unwind fully. **High point?** The silent meditations at the Well, which punctuated my own retreat with focused, quiet space. **Low point?** None. **How much?** From R300 a night. See the website for special offers. www.temenos.org.za – *Tanya Broomhall*

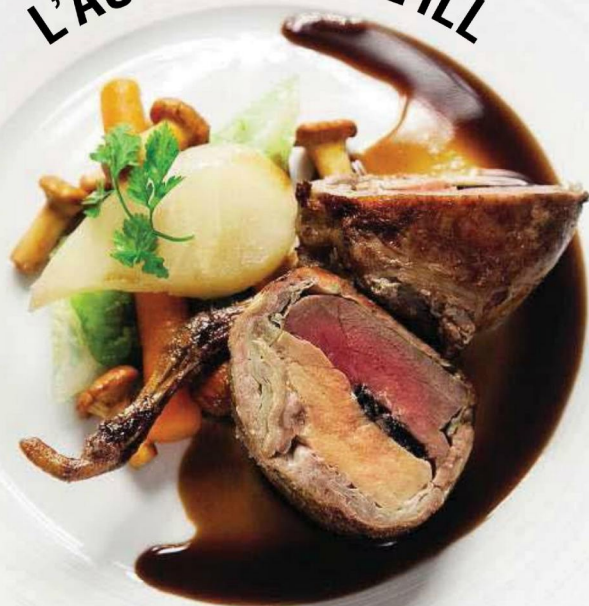


ST FRANCIS HEALTH CENTRE, *Port Alfred*

Where is it? On a large tract of land 1½ hours' drive from Port Elizabeth. **Why go?** Established and run by Anneliese Cowley, the St Francis Health Centre gives you time to be on your own to focus on your health and wellbeing. **Monastic or luxe retreat?** Comfortable. It's in an incredible setting overlooking a wildlife reserve, with walks that take you into magical, bird-filled spaces. **Who goes there?** A complete cross-section of society. **What can you eat and drink?** The menu is vegetarian and extremely regimented and strict. **Any chance of a massage or yoga session?** Three therapies a day are part of the package. Choose from aromatherapy massage, reflexology, shiatsu, body balancing, kinesiology, facials, manicures, callisthenics, yoga and aqua aerobics in a heated indoor pool. **What else can you do?** Walk The Labyrinth, or take long strolls past the nature reserve or hike on the beautiful beach nearby. **Long weekend or minimum stay of a week?** The minimum stay is one week. **High point?** The final consultation with Mrs Cowley, who puts you on the road to good health. Another highlight is her breathing and meditation class. **Low point?** Detoxification can cause headaches, muscle pain, backache and bad dreams. **How much?** From R8 082 per person sharing for a six-day course. www.stfrancishealthcentre.co.za – *Jenna Robbertse*



L'AUBERGE DE L'ILL



A MICHELIN THREE-STAR RESTAURANT IN BUCOLIC ALSACE, FRANCE, TAKES DINERS TO HEAVENLY HEIGHTS

WORDS GEORGE W STONE

Long ago, I interviewed Julia Child, and what she said struck a chord. 'You need to know what good food should taste like.' I didn't. But years of writing about food took me from Hungarian kielbasa in Ohio to khao soy in Chiang Mai. Each bite was an immersion in a place, a cuisine, a culture as I hit the road in search of landmark cuisine. And yet I yearned for a gold standard of a dinner, a feast of a lifetime. In the Alsace region of France, I found it.

Along a tributary of the Rhine, L'Auberge de l'Ill is a foodie's Holy Grail, a perpetual pinnacle of French gastronomy. Awarded three stars

– the highest rating – in the Michelin Guide in 1967, it is the second-longest holder of the accolade, and toiling in its kitchen is considered a rite of passage for aspiring chefs. If Michelin stars aren't your only metric, also savour the village setting of Illhaeusern, population 728, where a flower box-covered bridge spans a river Monet could have painted. Over generations, the Haeberlin family have erected a temple of haute cuisine from a rural inn. Decades ago, chef Paul Haeberlin's menu moved beyond traditional Alsatian favourites such as eel stewed in Riesling to a 'living cuisine' that embraced culinary finesse and imagination. The present chef, Paul's son Marc, has steadily built on this foundation. 'We keep the recipes my father created 45 years ago – those roots are essential. But we also push to make modern dishes.'

In contrast to the exhibitionism of today's centre-stage kitchens, the alchemy at L'Auberge is hidden. Chef Haeberlin's presence is felt more than seen. 'The star is not the chef. The star is the cuisine – and my place is in the kitchen,' he says.

My partner and I entered a seductive salon of crisp linen, all amber glow and crystal refraction. An *amuse-bouche* arrived – a golden cheese crouton atop a dollop of warm lentil stew, concealing a melted slice of creamy brie. Foie gras, a regional specialty, was served with an earthy coffee reduction and a pistachio-coated brioche. It was followed by butter-roasted sea bass and mushroom tortellini and a Thai-influenced lobster dish, fragrant with herbs.

We exhausted an immense cheese cart loaded with gooey époisses, stinky Pont-l'Évêque and a curious bell-shaped local cheese. A quartet of small dessert bites was followed by a knockout finale: diminutive plums sautéed in red wine over an almond cream mound, sprinkled with pistachio dust and crowned with an almond biscuit.

Five hours of culinary rapture passed like a comet. With the agony of the bill came a reminder of the ecstasy: chocolate truffles for the road. Travelling far to eat well is a luxury and not a sustainable one. But dining lovingly, in a place where the art of food truly matters, is the fleeting-eternal essence of cuisine. Plus, now I know what good food should taste like.

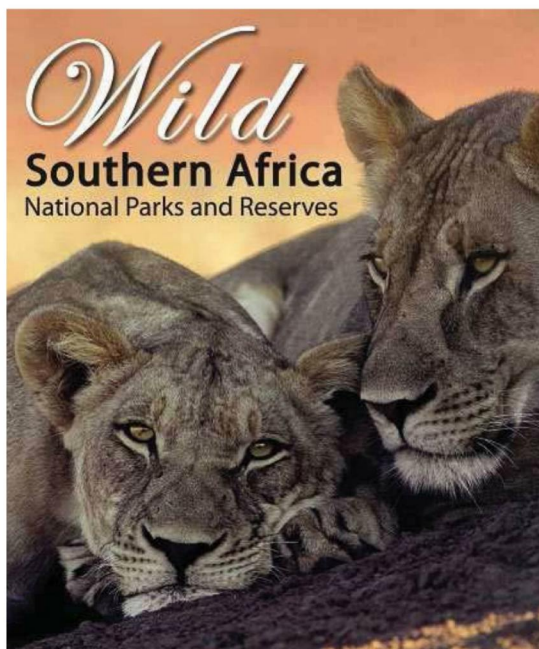
L'Auberge de l'Ill Plan on spending about R2 500 per person if you order à la carte. A six-course set lunch menu starts at R1 240; www.auberge-de-l-ill.com



PLACE SETTING
FROM TOP The restaurant's façade is made from heat-treated ash and steel; côtelette de pigeon au chou et aux truffes; a floor-to-ceiling Murano glass curtain in Auberge de l'Ill

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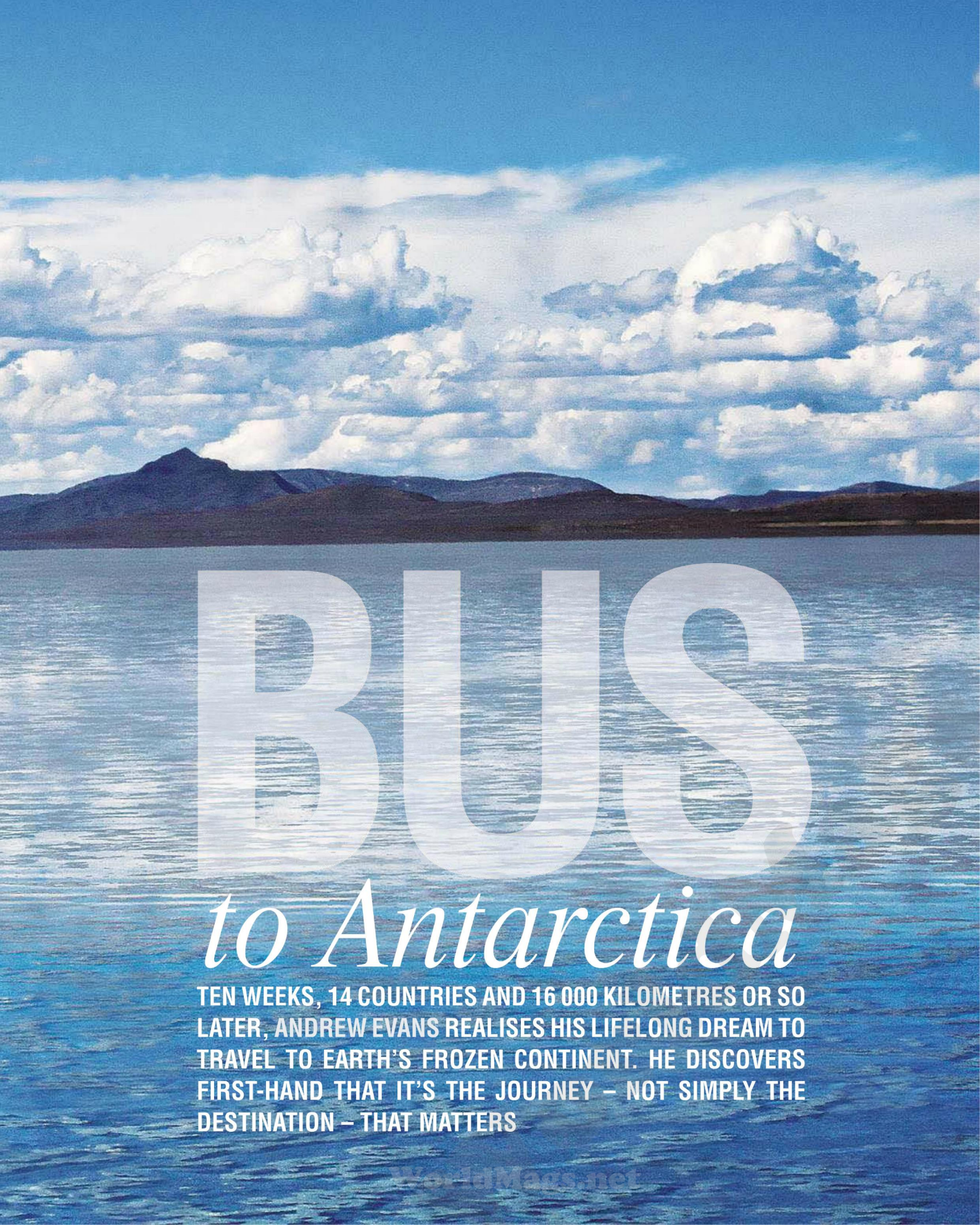


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WALKING ON WATER?

Dreamlike sights, such as the Uyuni salt flat in Bolivia, were a highlight of Andrew Evans's magic bus ride to Antarctica. 'A film of rainwater covered the flat,' says Evans, who took the photo, 'making it look like a mirror reflecting the sky'





BUS *to Antarctica*

TEN WEEKS, 14 COUNTRIES AND 16 000 KILOMETRES OR SO LATER, ANDREW EVANS REALISES HIS LIFELONG DREAM TO TRAVEL TO EARTH'S FROZEN CONTINENT. HE DISCOVERS FIRST-HAND THAT IT'S THE JOURNEY – NOT SIMPLY THE DESTINATION – THAT MATTERS

I FORGET WHICH BIRTHDAY IT WAS, BUT I DO REMEMBER THAT I WISHED FOR ANTARCTICA WHEN I BLEW OUT THE CANDLES ON MY CAKE.

Impossible dreams make good birthday wishes, and I used mine silently hoping that somehow, someday, I would make it to Earth's frozen continent. I had wanted to travel to Antarctica ever since I learned such a place existed. I craved the haphazard polar voyages of men before the era of aeroplanes and travel brochures. Those early travellers seemed so sincere as they set off for the bottom of the world with their optimism, simple dogsleds and year's supply of stationery. In pursuit of my dream, I auditioned for scientific internships on research ships and applied for menial jobs on American polar bases. I wrote elaborate proposals for special grants that were never granted and made wild attempts to win Internet contests. None of those efforts bore fruit. So I decided to just go.

I traced an imaginary path on a map from Washington DC, where I live, down to the seventh continent. Where there's a road there's a way, I figured, and much of the distance to Antarctica was paved with roads. All I had to do was head south for roughly 16 000 kilometres until the road ended in Tierra del Fuego. From there it was less than a knuckle's width of mapped sea to Antarctica. The catch was to figure out an affordable way to travel. My research revealed there were public buses in every country I'd pass through to the frozen continent. If I made no reservations and had no daily itinerary, bus travel would approximate the journeys of early explorers. For the spots of water I'd cross – the Strait of Magellan and the Drake Passage – it looked like I'd have to forsake bus for boat.

I eagerly mapped out a rough 10-week plan, arranged to post entries to *NG Traveler's* blog from the road, bought my first bus ticket – and embarked on my one-man polar expedition from a bus stop in Washington DC. It was New Year's Day and all I carried was a backpack stuffed with clothes, a camera and a new National Geographic flag. I took the S2 Metrobus down 16th Street past the White House. An hour later I boarded a Greyhound bus to Atlanta, nervously anticipating the long road ahead. The bus driver took my ticket and asked routinely, 'Your final destination, sir?' 'Antarctica,' I mumbled. Greyhound wouldn't get me all the way there, but it could take me almost 2 000 kilometres closer to my dream.

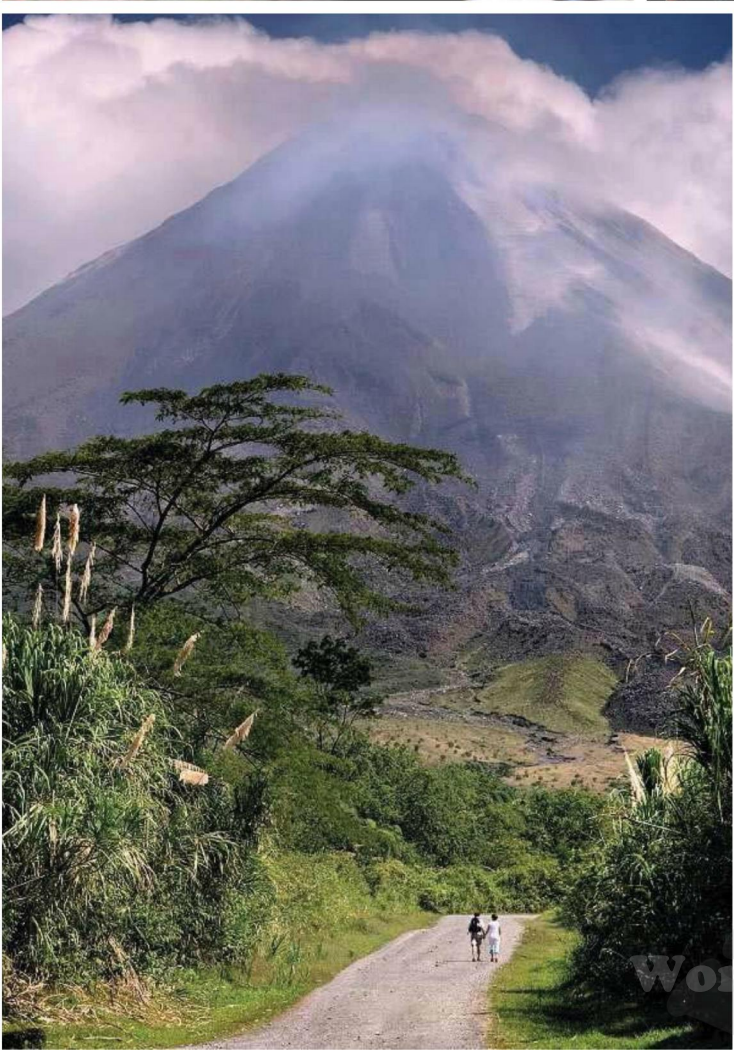
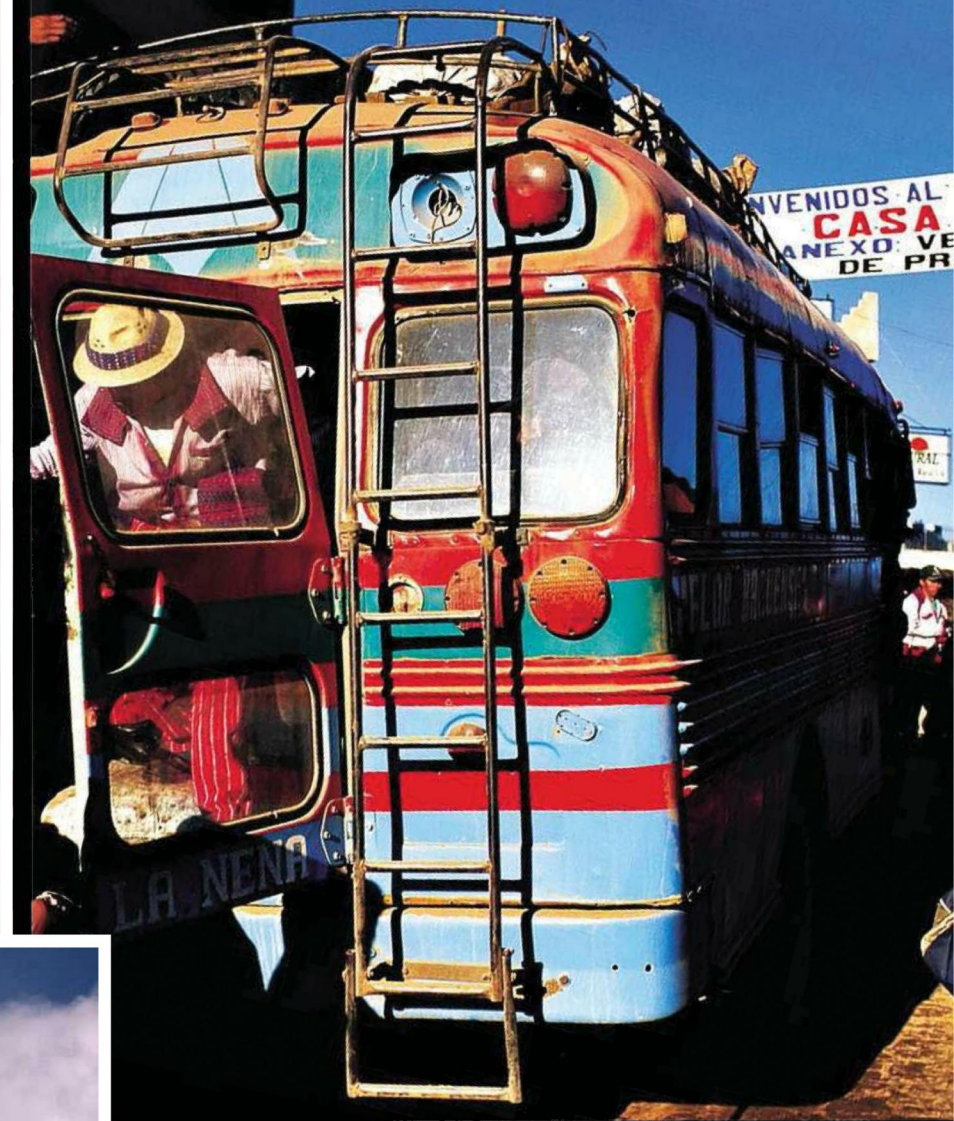
After three days of riding silver buses across the American South I found myself at a roadside rest stop in northern Mexico at midnight. While the other bus passengers slept, I ventured out into the cold, dry air and stretched my legs, kicking holes in the dust while the bus driver had a smoke. Aside from the glowing tip of his cigarette and some vague white stars, the only light flickered from a pile of orange embers on the ground, where a lone Indian woman wearing a red wool cap squatted and shaped tortillas, pat-pat-pat. I felt overwhelmed by the obscure scene and the utter darkness. I'd been to Mexico before, but not like this. The bus had delivered me to an invisible part of the world.

I HOPPED FROM ONE BUS to the next over the coming days, grabbing any seat that was going south. In Guatemala, my ride was a school bus painted with a rainbow of trim and with unhappy chickens wedged beneath the seats. A bus attendant hung from the open door with one hand and announced the destination, Huehuetenango, by shouting 'Hué, Hué!' to everyone waiting. Any spot where a person stood waving became a bus stop. A hundred heads bobbed in time with the road. When the bus cruised around mountain turns, our jam-packed bodies slid from side to side. Audio speakers blared a soundtrack for the jungle landscape, but the CD skipped every time we hit a bump, turning sappy Latin love songs into thumping Spanish rap and back again.

After Guatemala's hairpin-turn highways, the bus careening along the edge of every mountain, we trailed through El Salvador's smoky backyards and the hacienda-feeling countryside of Honduras. The giant volcano hovering in the distance marked Nicaragua. In Costa Rica, the road became all twisty and pimpled with gaping pot holes. We crossed into Panama, then over its famous canal on the Bridge of the Americas. The next hurdle was the geographical difficulty between Panama and Colombia known as the Darién Gap, a swath of jungle and swamp that forms a tricky 160 kilometre interruption in the Pan-American Highway. My options around it: boat or plane. Taking a tip from noted adventurer Paul Theroux, who for his best-selling book *The Old Patagonian Express* chose a plane ride, I flew to Cartagena, Colombia. There I boarded the next bus and within hours was travelling through the beautiful, and steep, Colombian Andes. These eventually gave way to Ecuador's endless green banana fields. Then came a jungle road in Peru that turned into a desert track; I tasted the dust on my teeth. Bus by bus I motored on into Bolivia, where, halfway across, the road vanished; the bus just followed tyre tracks across the stratospherically high Uyuni plain.

TICKET TO RIDE

BUS2ANTARCTICA BEGAN SIMPLY: TRAVEL WRITER ANDREW EVANS DECIDED HE WAS GOING TO ANTARCTICA, BUT WANTED TO GET THERE WITHOUT SPENDING A BOATLOAD OF MONEY. SO HE WENT TO *NG TRAVELER* WITH A PROPOSAL: HE'D TAKE THE BUS – A GUARANTEED ADVENTURE – AND POST ENTRIES TO THEIR INTELLIGENT TRAVEL BLOG EN ROUTE. THOSE OF US WHO FOLLOWED ANDREW ON HIS 10-WEEK RIDE TO ANTARCTICA LOOKED FORWARD TO HIS DAILY TWEETS, HIS THOUGHTFUL BLOG POSTS, HIS VIDEOS SHOWING VAST LANDSCAPES AND PLAYFUL PENGUINS – AND GLIMPSES OF HIS GROWING BEARD. TO RELIVE THE JOURNEY, ENJOY ALL OF THESE AND MORE AT WWW.NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM/BUS2ANTARCTICA.



LOCAL LOCOMOTION

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Coca leaves, readily available in the Andes, help relieve altitude sickness; road-worn but still colourful, a bus offloads passengers in Guatemala; snow-frosted peaks and high valleys mark the Andes range; Nicaragua is known as 'the country of lakes and volcanoes'

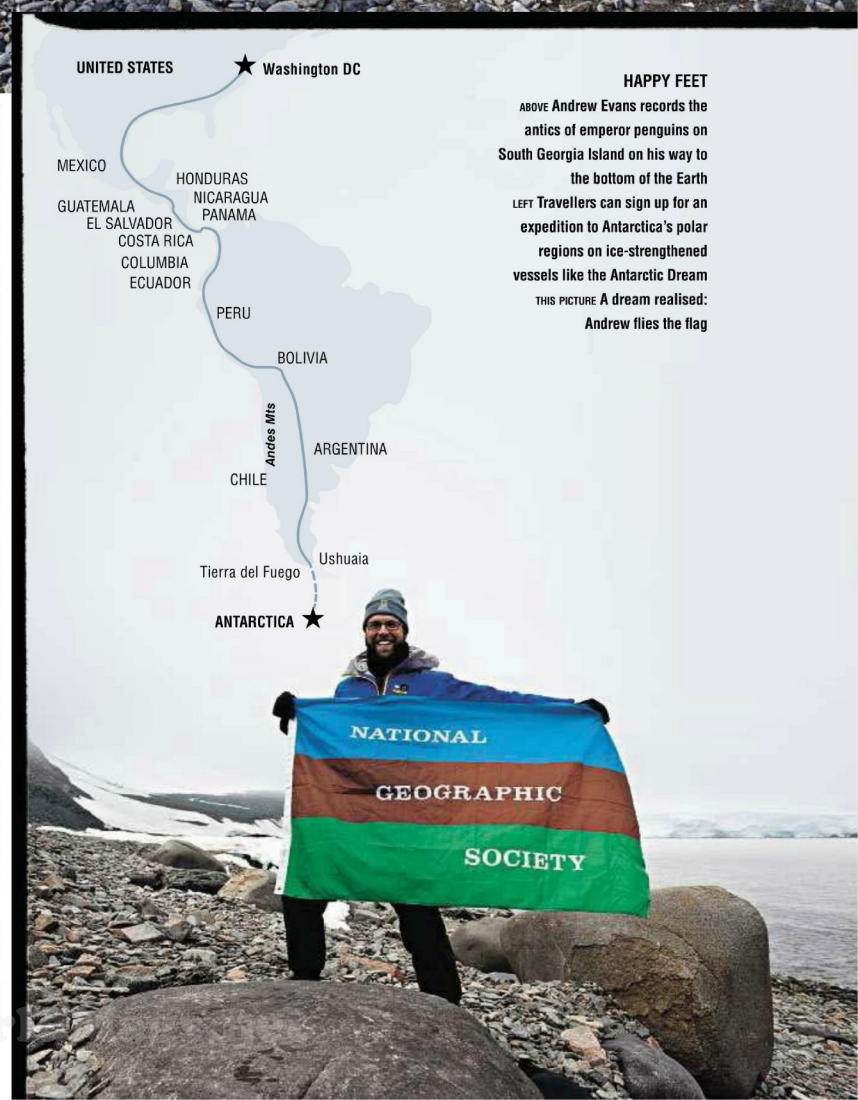
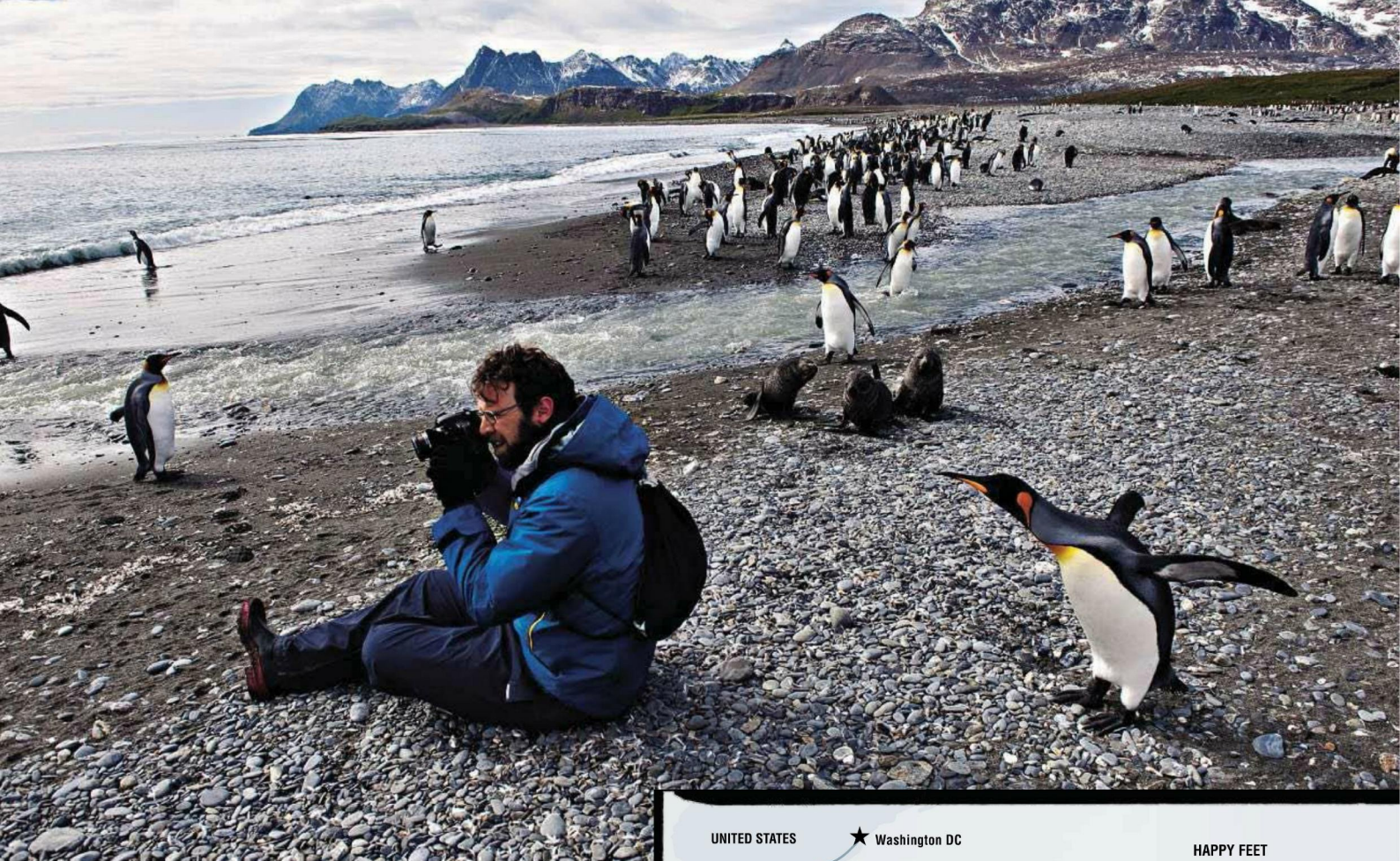
IN PURSUIT OF MY DREAM, I AUDITIONED FOR SCIENTIFIC INTERNSHIPS ON RESEARCH
I WROTE ELABORATE PROPOSALS FOR SPECIAL GRANTS THAT WERE NEVER GRANTED AND

ICE ICE BABY

The Antarctic ice sheet is the largest single mass of ice on Earth, holding about 61 percent of the planet's fresh water. Here, Adélie penguins cavort in front of an iceberg near Dumont d'Urville, a French scientific station

SHIPS AND APPLIED FOR MENIAL JOBS ON AMERICAN POLAR BASES.
MADE WILD ATTEMPTS TO WIN INTERNET CONTESTS





Asphalt, smooth asphalt, returned in Argentina. Eager to catch my boat across the Drake Passage to Antarctica, I raced down these last kilometres – the length of Argentina – in just seven days, watching the landscape transition from Córdoba's flat green pampas to Patagonia's dry brown hills to the snow-sifted mountains of Tierra del Fuego (where we detoured briefly into Chile). The air cooled as we proceeded and I noticed the austral sun setting later and later. When nights came, I tried to sleep by folding my 1,95 metre body into a bus seat and dreaming of Antarctica.

One night, somewhere in Colombia, I was awakened by a loud crash, followed by our bus rumbling off the road. Nobody risked stepping out to see what happened, fearing bandits. I finally got off with the driver – and we discovered the cow our bus had hit and killed. As the sole passenger with a camera, I was enlisted to help document the carnage for the police. Ironically, accidents and breakdowns offered new opportunities for discovery. Cruising at 3 600 kilometres along the Peruvian Andes, I'd just noticed that my inflatable neck pillow had sprung a leak when the wheels on the bus went pop, pop, pop. The flat tyres occupied our driver for hours, which I spent taking walks across the rock-strewn altiplano, gazing up at the bluest skies I've ever seen.

Passenger participation was mandatory in Bolivia. Each time we got stuck in mud – a regular occurrence – the bus driver would fling open the door and motion out our mix of bleary-eyed backpackers and gold-toothed Aymara Indians. Together we built piles of rocks behind each tyre, then put shoulder to bumper and heaved. When we finally dislodged the bus, we sloshed through puddles to reboard.

Still, I can't think of a greater disappointment than rushing a first visit to Bolivia; it's like taking a kid to Disney World for the first time and telling him it closes in 10 minutes – forever. During my week travelling through it, Bolivia delivered some of the most memorable landscapes on a journey through remarkable places. The town of Uyuni, in southwestern Bolivia, for example, gives its name to the largest salt flat on Earth, which occupies a vast, dried-up prehistoric lake. At 10 582 square kilometres and over 80 times larger than the Etosha Pan in Namibia, Uyuni's arid salt flat gives the odd sensation of standing on a blank piece of paper – a wide-open feeling of nothingness that attracts thousands of sightseers yearly.

The surprise upon our arrival was that heavy seasonal rains had turned the salt flat into a salt water flat. I found myself walking through ankle-deep lukewarm brine that crystallised up my leg on contact. Equally curious was the extraordinary way in which the sun reflected off the forever horizon of salt water – which burned my skin to a crisp.

Descending from high-altitude Bolivia into the desert hills of Argentina's Jujuy region proved another scenic highlight. Drab rock landscapes suddenly turned into pink-tinted rock formations, coloured sandstone swirls, twisting mountain streams and saguaro-like cacti. It felt as if we were driving through the arid reaches of southern Arizona – and it was hot. How hot? My thermometer claimed the temperature was 48°C.

However, travelling in Argentina was a relief because everything was suddenly easy. Need a shower and nap before your next bus? There's a hotel with rooms for a few dollars an hour around the corner. Plus you can check your email and recharge any batteries.

MY LAST NIGHT, on the final bus, it snowed. I used the occasion to mark my progress with a highlighter on a tattered map, amazed at the distance I'd covered on wheels. Finally, we rolled into a rainy parking lot in Ushuaia. This was it: the end of the road at the bottom of the continent. We stopped next to a dock for ships with reinforced hulls. On board one the next day I would spot my first icebergs.

Looking back now, I see my transcontinental ride as a road for which only I know the directions. My bus fare from Washington DC to Antarctica? A total of R8 475 – half the price of a plane ticket for the same distance. The bus took longer, yes, but I got to see everything we miss out on when we choose to fly: the gradual changes from one place to another – and the real size of Earth. Before my trip, I only guessed at the planet's actual size. Now I've felt every centimetre of my roller-coaster route in my lower back. I know the rhythm of so many landscapes from resting my forehead against countless bus windows.

On a bus, I can tell you, the world is measured in days. Earth is small – so much smaller than I once believed. Part of me wishes I could go back to the time when the planet felt huge and infinite. We accept intellectually that things don't become smaller, but secretly we may still wonder. Perhaps travel is the way we check our bearings, just to make sure. Are we getting bigger? Or is the world shrinking? What I do know is that my trip to Antarctica is no longer a dream. It's now a vivid memory.

ANTARCTICA AT LAST: 'IT'S JUST YARDS AWAY!'

ANDREW EVANS TWEETED ON 14 FEBRUARY 2010. 'I'M LOOKING RIGHT AT ANTARCTICA, AND I'M BEYOND EXUBERANT!' AMONG THE SIGHTS GREETING HIM: EERIE BLUER-THAN-BLUE SPLINTERS OF SEA ICE DRIFTING OFF THE ANTARCTIC COAST AND COLONIES OF EMPEROR PENGUINS. 'IS THIS PLACE BEAUTIFUL? OH YES. NO LAND CAN COMPARE,' EVANS POSTED LATER. 'ANTARCTIC LANDSCAPES ARE HYPNOTIC. THE MOVING FLOES OF BRASH ICE PULL MY GAZE INTO THEIR COLD AND SHIFTING PATTERNS. IF I SPENT HALF A LIFETIME DREAMING OF ANTARCTICA BEFORE I ARRIVED HERE, I WILL SPEND THE OTHER HALF PLOTTING MY RETURN.'

ITCHY FEET

Andrew Evans is National Geographic's digital nomad – always travelling and always wired. He recently took a transatlantic journey from Cape Horn to the Cape of Good Hope. Go to digitalnomad.nationalgeographic.com and share in the adventure as he explores great destinations around the globe. Interact online in the comments and on Twitter: @WheresAndrew.

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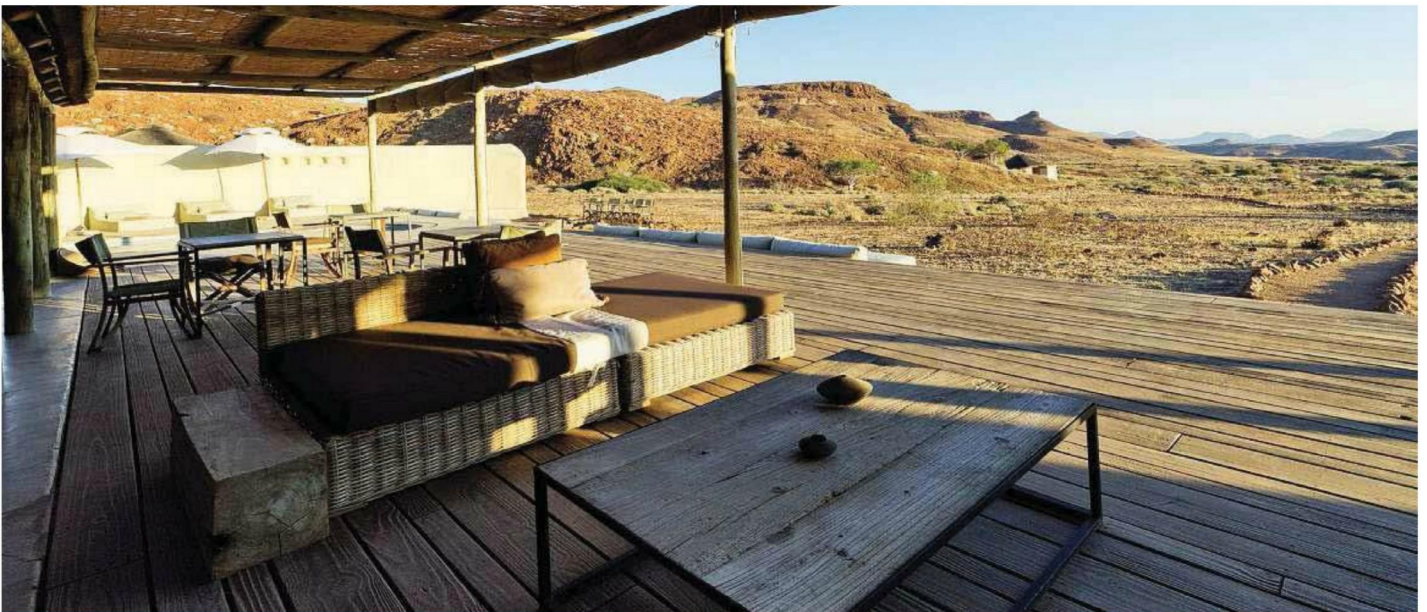
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Kulala Desert Lodge offers panoramic views of the famous sand dunes of Sossusvlei, breathtaking mountain scenery and vast open plains. Set in the 37 000-hectare Kulala Wilderness Reserve bordering the Namib Naukluft Park, there is an abundance of space and silence to be found here. Damaraland Camp boasts panoramic vistas of stark plains, ancient valleys and the soaring inselberg of the Brandberg mountains. The camp integrates the local community and environment through sustainable ecotourism.

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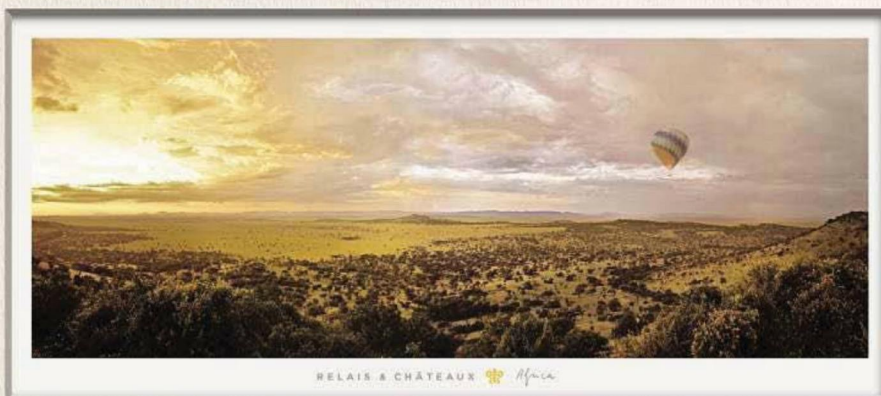
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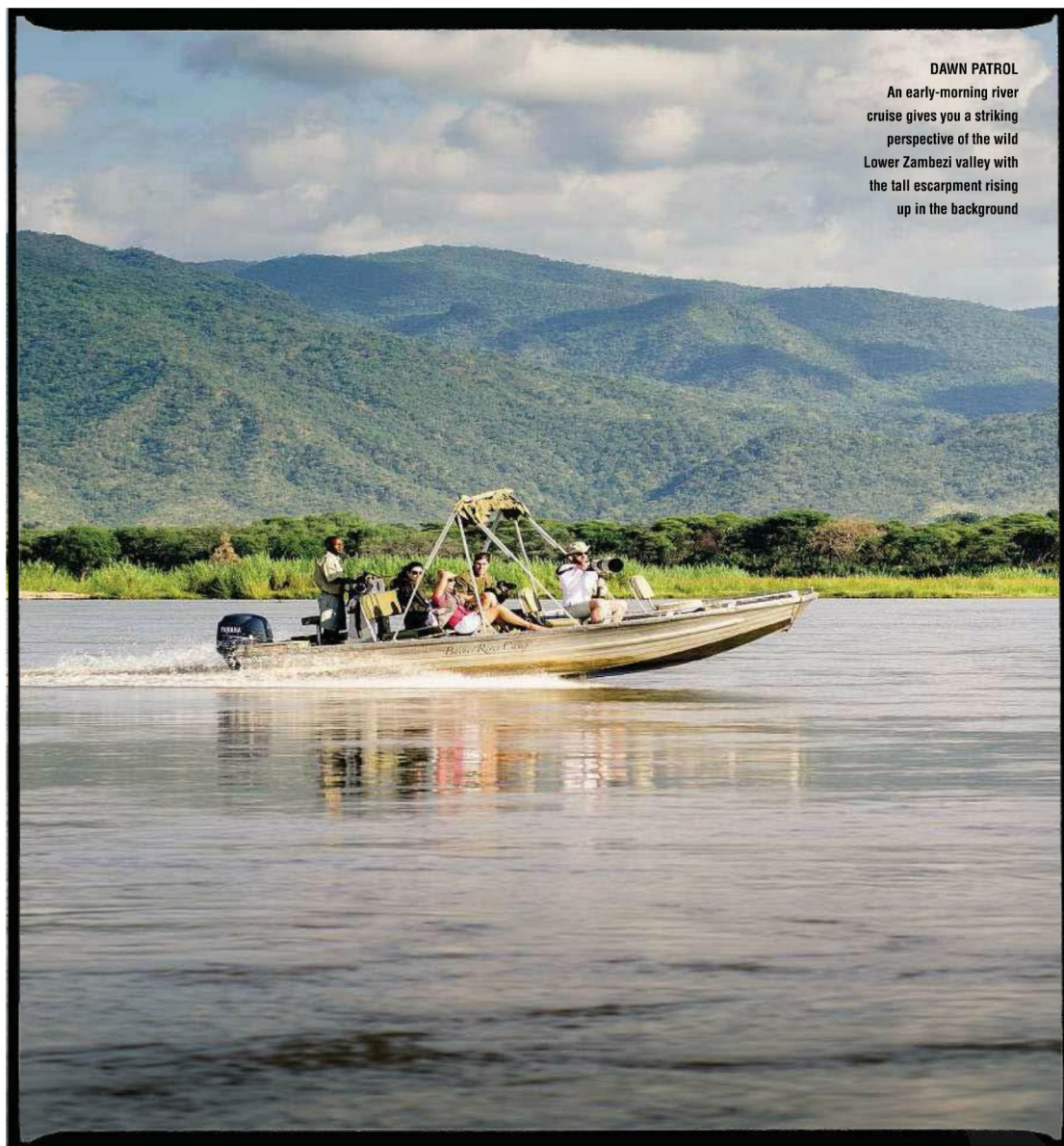


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Lower Zambezi valley with
the tall escarpment rising
up in the background

THE RIVER OF LIFE

**AT BAINES' RIVER CAMP IN ZAMBIA'S REMOTE LOWER ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK,
LIFE EBBS AND FLOWS AT THE PACE OF THE OMNIPRESENT ZAMBEZI RIVER**

WORDS SALLY RUTHERFORD PHOTOGRAPHS ADRIAAN LOUW

THE ALLURE OF A SAFARI is the illusion that we are explorers uncovering for the first time the great mysteries of an uncharted land. There is no doubt that the enormous shift in perspective as you go from urban chaos to the natural order of the wild is deeply moving and can be life changing. But it was the utterly uncontrived nature of my sojourn at Baines' River Camp that brought home how carefully curated some of my previous 'bush' holidays had been – and, by contrast, how refreshingly wild and unmediated a Lower Zambezi National Park safari is.

Baines' River Camp is tucked among giant tamarind and jackalberry trees on the banks of the Zambezi River. The Zambezi – the fourth largest river in Africa – flows through six countries on its 2 700km-long journey from its source in northwestern Zambia to the Indian Ocean. The opposite bank is in Zimbabwe – the Mana Pools World Heritage Site, to be exact. Gaze at the waters for long enough and you realise that the log on a nearby sandbar is not a tree trunk but an alarmingly large Nile crocodile basking in the sun. Close your eyes and the grunts and snorts of hippos tell you where to direct your camera lens for a close-up of a lifetime. Elephants graze the razor-sharp reeds on the many islands that dot the river. Birdlife is prolific, and the calls of fish eagles (Zambia's national bird) provide a suitable background anthem.

Baines' is in the heart of the protected Eastern Chiawa Game Management Area, adjoining the Lower Zambezi National Park: together, they offer some 4 200 square kilometres of undeveloped bush to explore. This is one of Africa's last remaining true wilderness areas: you'll find no fences and you'll be given no blithe assurances of guaranteed sightings. With such a huge expanse of land for game to roam in, this is about as far from a potted safari as you can get.

After flying to Lusaka and from there to the nearby Royal Zambezi Airstrip, it is a sheer delight to sink into a camp chair, chilled drink in hand, and allow the river to hypnotise you. The vibe at Baines' is warm and very welcoming, the service impeccable yet so discreet you relax entirely. The luxurious colonial-style lodge with just eight individual suites is completely unostentatious yet deeply comfortable. It feels like your own (admittedly very stylish) holiday house, a place you yearn to go back to all year and be that self you really, really want to be – the one who notices every minute detail of your surroundings, reads those books, celebrates the mellow ebb and flow of life on the river.

My visit is in the weeks following the summer rains and the surrounding bush is dense and lush. Not great for game viewing, it must be said, but the albizia forests, lala palm groves and miombo woodlands are alive with promise. The ancient baobabs, some over 1 000 years old, seem proof that the timeless landscape is untouched.

At dawn the next day we head deep into the Lower Zambezi National Park on safari boats. While hippos keep a wary eye out for us (and vice versa) and crocs slide slyly into the murky water, the many elephants don't deign to notice us, letting us get unbelievably close.

All too soon we disembark inside the park, fuel up with peanut biscotti and coffee, and set off through the bush in an open game-viewing vehicle. One of the joys of an intimate lodge such as Baines' is that if you come across a great sighting, meals will be supplied in situ – no rushing back to camp to keep to some preordained schedule. With unlimited traversing rights, odds are this is a luxury you'll really appreciate. The peace is profound, broken only by the calls of some of the 350 bird species that live in this twitcher's utopia.

My highlight, though, is the canoe safari. We slip silently down the Zambezi and through a slower-moving channel. The animals and birds seem to ignore us, giving me the sense that I am truly part of this magical, mystical environment. A family of baboons is sprawled in the sun along a grassy bank, for all the world like a family enjoying a lazy Sunday picnic. Giant herons and fish eagles flap lazily away only at the very last minute. When a skittish matriarchal herd of elephants finally braves our presence to drink less than 20 metres away, we are gifted with the precious sight of a baby that senior game ranger (and seasoned riverman) Leonard Kalio estimates to be under a month old.

Back in camp I cool off in the river-edge pool. Those with more energy head out on a tiger-fishing expedition (strictly catch-and-release); this time, it is the women who have all the luck, to the rather grudging congratulations of the more experienced male anglers.

However long your stay at Baines' River Camp, it could never be enough. While I don't get to tick off Big Five sightings in a frenzy of accomplishment, it is enough to know that Africa's game is thriving in this pristine paradise – as evidenced by the large lion spoor covering our vehicle's tracks not 100 metres out of camp. We may not see it, but it sure has a wary eye on us!

Baines' River Camp From R3 956 per person sharing; www.bainesrivercamp.com. It is part of the Mantis Collection; www.mantiscollection.com



PHOTOGRAPH DAVID ROGERS



GO WITH THE FLOW
opposite Gliding silently
down the Zambezi River in
a canoe, you become part
of this untamed paradise.
THIS PAGE Home from home
at Baines' River Camp is an
utterly comfortable Explorer
Suite overlooking the river

NGT READER OFFER

Book four nights including return flights from Lusaka to Baines for R13 000 per person in the green season (1 March to 30 June) or R16 500 per person in high season (1 July to 14 November), including all safari activities, park entry fees, conservation and community levies, meals, selected drinks, WiFi and daily laundry service. Excludes private use of camp facilities, premium beverages, beauty treatments and massages and personal purchases. Valid until 14 November 2012. To book call 033 342 7498 or email reservations@bainesrivercamp.com and quote 'NGT special'.

GETTING THERE 1time Airline flies daily from Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London and George to Joburg; see www.1time.co.za for the best fares. SAA flies daily from Joburg to Lusaka, from R3 859 return, www.tlysaa.com. From Lusaka, Proflight Zambia offers a 30-minute connection to the Royal Zambezi Airstrip, from R3 390 return, www.proflight-zambia.com. To book a private 2010 Pilatus PC12 NG charter flight from any airport in South Africa, contact www.bainesrivercamp.com.



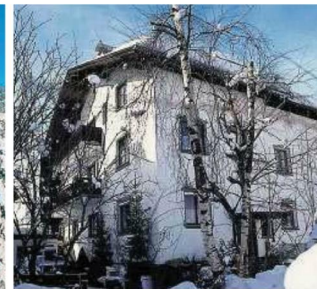
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BANFF PARK LODGE, CANADIAN ROCKIES



CHALET HANS, NASSEREIN, ST ANTON, AUSTRIA

IN A WORD?

Luxe

WHY GO?

It offers a great range of skiing for all levels, plus heliskiing for the more adventurous.

Family-friendly

Tignes has brilliant slopes, a glacier and new lifts with hardly any queues. Club Med is a minute from the lifts, so you can ski-in and ski-out. The main plus was that Club Med took care of everything and everyone, day and night – including our kids.

We flew to Geneva and then took a three-hour bus transfer to Club Med. (Our bus trip had a bit of a school-outing vibe.)

Adventure

Chasing the snow: this pristine World Heritage Site has three resorts – Banff Mount Norquay, Sunshine Village and Lake Louise, which between them offer 200km of trails over 7 748 acres. Get a central ski pass and search out what's best for you each day.

Fly via London or Frankfurt to Calgary, and then take one of the regular road transfers to Banff.

Après-ski

Some of the best après-ski in Europe, great terrain for intermediate and advanced skiers and snowboarders, but go early in the season to get the best snow. Some of the slopes back into resort can be tricky so it's not one for beginners.

Fly to Geneva and get a transfer or the ski train right to the resort.

HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

Fly to Geneva and then take a train to Zermatt.

VIBE?

Less sporty and more posey – you'll spot way more furs than Patagonia jackets. It's quite a flush crowd, like a younger version of St Moritz.

Family friendly; a very well-organised, all-inclusive holiday.

Relaxed but well-organised for those who want to be challenged.

Party: expect to hear live music, dance on the tables and drink Jäger bombs. That said, there are family facilities too.

CLIENTELE?

Not necessarily the types who want to ski all day: long lunches and late-night drinks are a big thing here.

Mainly families, often large groups of four or five families travelling together.

Intermediate to very experienced skiers looking for a Rocky Mountain experience.

Young and old, looking for fun times.

GOOD ROOMS?

Rooms are big with contemporary interiors (unusual on the slopes), iPod docking stations, WiFi, etc.

Our small interleading family room with a bathroom had a view of the slopes. No great shakes but comfy.

Oversized and comfortable, with a private balcony. The Deluxe Jacuzzi Rooms have private hot tubs.

Ours was distinctly average as we were on a budget, but you can choose a luxurious, fully catered option.

FACILITIES?

Excellent facilities, the best being a spa with hot indoor and outdoor pools. Rates include a ski guide and ski equipment.

Excellent, including the superb Kids' Club, which had both children skiing down steep red runs within days. We hired boots and skis there.

All the expected amenities, including optional WiFi and cable TV, plus communal recreation facilities, heated indoor pool, steam room and hot tub.

Very good. Modern spa wellness centre, lots of clothes shops, souvenirs and extensive ski equipment shops, banks, chemist.

EATING & DRINKING?

We had great pizza and Thai at restaurants on the slopes and were spoilt for choice with silver-service options. The hotel restaurant is closed at night, but you can get a burger or soup and salad served in the library.

The food and snacks were good all day, and the huge restaurant offered different buffets every night. Everything is included – it was great not having to convert how much each cocktail or snack was setting us back.

Eat at the lodge's fine dining or family-style restaurants or head into Banff for a wide range of restaurants, from steakhouses to sushi bars.

Don't miss the MooserWirt: it's the bar to go to in St Anton. Check out The Rodel Hutte at the top of Nasserein – traditional Tyrolean food, but the real bonus is hitting the toboggan run on a sled afterwards to take you home.

HIGH POINT?

The Omnia is a good example of how contemporary architecture can work so well in a more traditional setting.

The glacier and altitude mean you're almost guaranteed good snow. The kids had a ball.

A two-day side trip to the ultra-extreme Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, plus a heliskiing day trip from Panorama.

Without a doubt, the MooserWirt.

LOW POINT?

The 20-minute 'train' ride to get up to the slopes.

The resort is purpose built and so a little lacking in character.

None.

The trek back to Nasserein. Stay in the centre of St Anton if you can.

VALUE FOR MONEY?

Yes, for the experience.

Totally.

Once you've flown to Canada, it is good value for a fantastic experience.

No, as it was self-catering, but you can get reasonable fully catered chalets.

WILL YOU RETURN?

Yes, if travelling with just one other couple. For groups, a chalet is best.

Definitely, if we can get in.

Yes.

Have already done so!

PRICE?

From R5 625 per room per night; www.the-omnia.com – Georgia Black

From R45 428 for a family of four for 7 nights; www.clubmed.co.za – Tammy Schneiderman

From R1 153 per person sharing per night; www.banffparklodge.com – Nic Hodgson

From R5 467 per person sharing for 7 nights; www.igluski.com – Lucinda Brook



ADAMANT LODGE, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Extreme

This is a top-drawer, high-adrenaline experience of a lifetime. California Mountain Holidays (CMH) gives you a 'vertical guarantee' of 30 500m in a week of heliskiing in pristine wilderness terrain in mountains covering 12 349 square kilometres.

Fly via London or Frankfurt to Calgary. Take a bus from Calgary to Golden, and then a helicopter from Golden to the lodge (included in most packages).

It has a very luxurious, superprofessional and adrenaline-fuelled atmosphere.

An international mix of serious ski enthusiasts.

Comfortable. A very exclusive experience – Adamant sleeps just 44 people in total.

Extras include a climbing wall, games room, outdoor hot tub, sauna, gear shop and WiFi. A limited number of snowboards is available.

Highly skilled chefs produce delicious 'mountain casual' gourmet cuisine. Enjoy drinks from the full-service bar in front of the fire or on the expansive outdoor decks. **A hot lunch is flown out to you on the slopes by helicopter.**

One of the most intense, hyper-aware weeks of my lifetime – try this at least once in your skiing career.

None.

Very expensive, but worth every cent, and the price is all-inclusive.

Next is perhaps a 'steeper & deeper' trip to Alaska's Chugach Mountains.

R87 600 for 7 days; www.canadianmountainholidays.com

– NH



HAUS NENNING B&B, LECH, AUSTRIA

Affordable & family friendly

Value for money in an upmarket resort. Haus Nenning is a ski-in, ski-out chalet – ski home too fast and you could end up smashing right through the glass front door. One lift pass gives you access to the entire Arlberg ski area (including St Anton).

Fly direct to Zurich and then take one of four daily bus transfers (3½ hours) directly into the village of Lech.

Quietly sophisticated and pleasantly quiet. For après-ski hedonism, head to St Anton instead, although Lech has some pockets of fun.

Families and couples. Look out for European Royalty and expect to see fur and the very latest ski fashions.

The 10 comfy en-suite rooms have cable TV. There is free WiFi in communal areas.

Ski boot and equipment hire is available in the chalet. The resort is small enough for older kids and teens to roam free and be independent.

A breakfast buffet is included. Co-owner Marylyn Nenning will help you navigate Lech's many restaurants, from pizza joints to fine dining.

Vast ski area. The snow quality is exceptional and snow quantity almost guaranteed because of the altitude.

None.

Incredibly well priced.

Yes.

From R688 per person sharing per night; www.nenning-lech.at

– NH



SKI SUR, CERRO CATEDRAL, BARILOCHE, ARGENTINA

All-rounder

Good for beginners and intermediate skiers. Great for groups who want to balance skiing with activities such as shopping in BA, wine tasting in Mendoza or side trips to Patagonia. It also means you can go skiing in the southern hemisphere winter.

Fly to Buenos Aires and then connect to Bariloche. This is a bit of a hassle since you have to transfer from the international to the domestic airport – 45 minutes by cab.

A mixed crowd on the slopes and very dependent on whether your trip coincides with Argentinian or Brazilian school holidays.

Predominantly South American snowboarders and skiers.

Very spacious one-bedroom apartment with lounge, dining area, kitchen and bathroom.

Apartments have a double bed plus sleeper couch, satellite TV and WiFi. There are great restaurants, bars and shopping.

Lunch at the good restaurants on the slopes is recommended.

There's a good après-ski scene, but prepare for a relatively early night, since most people bus or taxi in from Bariloche or villas surrounding Nahuel Haupi Lake. Fairly laid-back skiing, great food and night life.

None.

Argentina's runaway inflation makes it quite pricey compared to Austria.

If combined with trips to Patagonia or the Mendoza wine region.

Studio apartments from R2 086 per night (sleeps two); www.skisur.com

– Rory Spangenberg



CASA PRATI, ALAGNA, ITALIAN ALPS

Off the beaten track

Alagna is an off-piste mecca often called 'the best-kept secret of the Alps'. You can heliski, go with a guide, ski tour, you name it, and the pistes are great too. There are no lift queues. Alagna is for serious skiers and snowboarders.

Fly to Turin and organise a one-hour road transfer through a local ski rep company such as Zuba Ski.

Low-key but with great bars. Really friendly people (unlike in French resorts!) and all beers are served with delicious tapas and a smile.

An unpretentious crowd, here for the snow and to have fun. It feels very Italian and local.

Very comfortable, with en-suite bathrooms.

It's a small resort but has everything you need from good restaurants to a spa hotel. The ski shop next to the main lift is a good option.

Excellent. Our B&B chalet produced the most amazing breakfast. The restaurants in the village are all good après-ski – we hung out at Caffè delle Guide. Vineria an Baker has a dazzling array of wines and good tunes.

We had the slopes to ourselves. And the tapas with beer were great.

The busy lifts on Saturdays, when the locals flock to the slopes.

Yes! Everything is much cheaper than in French resorts.

Definitely.

From R476 per person sharing per night; www.zimmercasapрати.com

– LB

Whether you're after perfect powder or après-ski parties, we've got it covered

ski stays

HOW TO CONQUER THE *Grand Canyon*

If you have a limited amount of time, the key is choosing the right rim. As the crow flies, the Grand Canyon's average width is only about 16 kilometres, but driving to the opposite rim takes a whopping five-and-a-half hours – a fact that surprises many first-time visitors who come to 'do' the entire canyon in one shot. Indeed, each rim – South, North and West – offers a vastly different experience, worthy of its own foray

WORDS MARGARET LOFTUS

The popular South

Most of the nearly five million people who descend on the Grand Canyon every year flock to the South Rim. Easily accessible and home to the canyon's largest concentration of amenities, the gateway teems with visitors in the summer vying for glimpses of the gorge from the rim's sweet spots, such as Yavapai Observation Station and Desert View. The crowds ease up in spring and autumn – and so do the hot temperatures on the floor of the canyon. Venture below the rim via the popular Bright Angel and South Kaibab trails by mule (book several months in advance; www.grandcanyonlodges.com/mule-trips-716.html) or on foot. Not a big advance planner? Check with outfitters for availability on scheduled departures, which range from the Grand Canyon Field Institute's bare-bones educational hikes where you pack your essentials (www.grandcanyon.org/fieldinstitute) to Arizona Outback Adventures' mule-supported trips with airport transfers and three meals a day (www.aoa-adventures.com).



The peaceful North

The higher North Rim receives more snowfall than its southern counterpart, closing the road to visitors from the first heavy snowfall to mid-May. Concessions are limited, with one lodge and a single developed campground. Visitors are lured by the solitude of 'the other side', said to be reminiscent of the park's early days. The North maintains three lookout points that offer a sense of the sheer expanse of the canyon, such as the panoramic view at Cape Royal, where a sliver of the Colorado River can be glimpsed through a natural arch known as Angel's Window. The North Kaibab – the sole developed trail into the canyon from the North Rim – leads hikers and mules, which typically can be reserved the same day, into the canyon to Roaring Springs.

West to the Skywalk

Owned by the Hualapai and Havasupai Native American tribes, who have lived here for at least 800 years, the West Rim isn't actually in the national park, making a visit here more of a commercial experience. You'll find an Indian village, Western town, amphitheatre and, perhaps most striking, the Skywalk, a horseshoe-shaped, glass-bottom walkway that protrudes 20 metres from the canyon's edge. Outfitters offer activities below the rim not allowed in the park, such as helicopter fly-ins and pontoon boat rides on the Colorado River.

EXPLORE

Getting there

Flagstaff is a convenient drive from the North or South Rim. Phoenix and Las Vegas are launching points for many outfitted trips. Near the South Rim, there's a small airport, as well as rail service (www.thetrain.com). Free shuttles operate in and around the South Rim.

Where to stay

In-park accommodation varies from historic lodges and cabins to campgrounds. Book up to a year in advance, especially for the popular El Tovar and Phantom Ranch, on the floor of the canyon. Check the national park's website (www.nps.gov/grca) for links.

No walk in the park

The Grand Canyon can be dangerous. Stay clear of cliff edges and keep an eye on children to prevent falls. Cases of heat exhaustion are common in summer, when temperatures on the canyon floor can exceed 40°C. Drink about 500ml to one litre of fluid per hour, wear a brimmed hat and do not attempt to hike to the canyon floor and back in one day.

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

WORDS DAISANN MCLANE

Seasoned travellers know that nothing beats the local paper for getting insight into a place

El Dictamen, a popular newspaper in Veracruz, Mexico, leaves smudges of ink on my hands as I thumb through it over breakfast in the *zocalo*, or town square. It cost me four pesos (about R2,50), but the headlines – in Spanish – are priceless: ‘There was something for everyone at the Candelaria Festival!’ reads an exuberant article about a running of the bulls in a nearby town. ‘Music! Happiness and fun! Wounded bulls!’

The musicians I’ve come to see here, who will play marimba music on large wheeled wooden xylophones and the renowned Veracruzano son Jarocho on guitars and harps, haven’t yet set up in the *zocalo*. But *gracias* to *El Dictamen*, I’m getting a taste of Veracruz while I wait. A flip of the page to the section labelled ‘Socials’ offers a glimpse of lovely high-society Veracruzana teens in fabulously puffy white gowns celebrating their traditional coming-of-age 15th birthday in typical Mexican fashion: with a party. Another page flip, and I find the address of two travel agents who will sell me a same-day bus ticket to Oaxaca (*‘Servicio Rápido y Agradable!’*).

Here’s the thing: when I’m at home I hardly read newspapers – the paper version of them, that is. But travelling is another story. No matter where my forays take me, I wake up, look for coffee, read the local paper. Breakfast? It’s expendable. Newsprint is not.

As I read more local newspapers, I realise they’re in the same category as public squares, street markets and local coffee shops. They’re the heartbeat of any great place. If the papers are in a language I can read, great. But like a true addict, I’ll take whatever I can get. I’ve spent hours wandering lanes in small Asian towns looking for anything to read in English, only to settle for photo-filled broadsheets covered with the unfamiliar squiggles of Thai or Tamil.

What is it about travel that awakens the print junkie in me? I crave distractions, detours, unexpected encounters – anything that diverts me from the straight road between A and B. Reading the local paper is like roaming backstreets without a plan and watching residents go about their daily doings. It’s a wonderful way to get lost in the place.

I slow down and find the rhythm of a particular place in the present moment. I also learn – this is crucial for any traveller – answers to questions I wouldn’t think to ask. For instance, the last thing I would have thought to research online before my recent trip to Kerala, India, was whether there had been any recent prison breaks in the area. Thanks to the *Indian Express*, however, I learned on my fourth morning that ‘Ripper Jayanandan is nabbed from Ooty.’ I also find out the day’s gold price by gram (important if you’re going jewellery shopping) and the latest news on the approaching monsoon. And I pick up some of India’s acronym-happy political lingo: ‘Congress hopes on GoM’. You can know intellectually that India is the world’s largest democracy, but in the pages of the *Express* the nation’s vibrant political life is evident in every colourful headline.

The musicians in Veracruz start to tune up their ornate guitars. Then, without further ado, they race into ‘La Bamba’, their signature tune. It’s their first tune of the day, so their fingers are stiff, and they haven’t quite caught the rhythm yet. But here in Veracruz, my fingertips stained with local newspaper ink, I already have. Read more from Daisann McLane on www.therealtravelblog.com.



PHOTOGRAPH GREATSTOCK/CORBIS

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